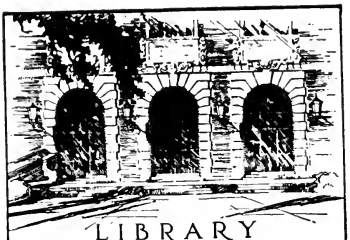

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RYBRENT DE CRUCE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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RYBRENT DE CRUCE.

CHAPTER I.

MANY months had elapsed since the Miss Starinvilles first drove from the door of Esterfield, to take up their abode at their father's house, with grief too acute, (as in the warmth of their youthful feelings they then thought,) to admit of increase. Yet what were their sorrows at that time, compared to the less tumultuous, but more intense agony of mind, with which they now quitted a dwelling already deserted by Rybrent de Cruce, and containing but the cold remains of the only being to whom alone, on his departure, they could look for advice, protection, and love? Obvious, how-

ever, as the comparison was, they were in no state to make it; but sinking back in the carriage, it stopped at Warrington before a word had been interchanged between its inmates.

At the door of the house stood Geoffry and Mrs. Rustleton, who had both been on the watch for the arrival of their young ladies, and whose respective faces and gestures might have furnished a limner with good personifications of active and passive Grief; he, wringing his hands, and writhing every muscle in his face, to keep back the tears which he was conscious were glistening in his eyes, while he paced up and down in trembling anxiety to be ready to open the carriage-door; and she, more than usually stately, standing quite still in all the composure of sober and solemn melancholy, with immovable features, and betraying no apparent intention of either speaking or stirring again. At the door, too, (a much more unusual sight,) stood Mademoiselle Jaqueline, with an expression of sympathy so deeply traced on her fine countenance, that had

the Miss Starinvilles' minds been sufficiently composed to have paid attention to any external objects, they must have been struck with a manifestation of interest so evident. But they were in no condition to make these remarks; and probably, unusual as such attendance was, would scarcely have noticed that she was there, but that Mr. Drywinkle, having opened the door, and assisted Clarina, who was languid with sorrow, to descend, turned hastily round, as he was mounting the steps with her, and seeing Mademoiselle Jaqueline performing the same office for Agatha, suddenly exclaimed, as if in a frenzy of rage and grief, "Why, Mrs. Rustleton, can't you take care of Miss Starinville, and leave Mademoiselle Jaqueline to mind her own mistress!"

This thundering apostrophe, in the steward's sharpest key, made all the party start; but the sorrowing sisters, anxious to escape to their own apartment, pressed on without regarding Geoffry's untimely etiquette, or observing what effect his angry exclamation had produced. In-

deed, Mrs. Rustleton's concentrated indignation, at what she certainly considered a very impertinent interference on Mademoiselle Jaqueline's part, was as deep, though not so noisy, as Mr. Drywinkle's fiery wrath. But as she took no active means to displace the interloper, Agatha proceeded, assisted by Jaqueline, to the hall. Thence she and Clarina passed together to their own apartment, where they remained for a considerable time, plunged in affliction too deep to allow even of mutual communication. From this, however, they were at length roused by a gentle knocking at the door, and Madame de Rouvier entered. She looked disturbed, and wore traces of care in her face, totally unlike its usually smiling expression; there was a querulous tone in her voice too, little resembling the former sweetness of its note: and the Miss Starinvilles, touched with this appearance of friendly sympathy in their distress, now exerted themselves to the utmost to comply with the wish she expressed, that they would descend to dinner. They accordingly

did so, and remained with her below till an early hour in the evening. They were, it is true, sad and silent; but she was as silent as themselves, if not as sad; and when they proposed to retire, she suffered them to go without any opposition.

Not a word passed respecting Mr. Claverham. Madame de Rouvier never mentioned him; and the Miss Starinvilles, absorbed in their own cares, had actually forgotten him, till, on retiring to their apartment in the evening, they were followed there by Mrs. Rustleton.

Nothing could be farther from the general habits of this dignified personage than any approach to loquacity, and the sympathy she really felt for the grief of her young mistresses had rather tended, as we have seen, to increase than to impair her natural taciturnity. But the solemnity of her sorrow had been much disturbed by seeing what she considered her especial privilege (the formal reception of her young ladies) infringed upon by the very person whom, of all others on earth, she detested; and her

own slow indignation having been gradually blown up into a flame by Mr. Drywinkle's vehement reproaches, she was, by this time, absolutely goaded into something like angry animation. Little accustomed, however, to the delivery of her sentiments, they issued forth, on the present occasion, with an utter disregard to all rules of language, or concatenation of subject, which would have rendered her discourse not very intelligible even to faculties less pre-occupied than those she addressed.

The Miss Starinvilles did not, indeed, for some time, understand any part of the meaning of various dark and detached sentences, in which she alluded to "people who were so very forward to take other people's places;" or observed that "people that made so much show of their pity, forsooth, were not always to be trusted;" or affirmed, still more dogmatically, though not a whit more intelligibly to her auditors, that "some people were prouder and more disagreeable than ever!" All these assertions were strangely intermingled with expressions

and tokens of real sorrow for Miss De Cruce's death, and compassion for her young ladies. They did not interrupt her, however; and having, at length, in the career of her incoherent harangue, fairly mentioned Mademoiselle Jaqueline's name, her ideas seemed instantly to run in a freer course, and she continued,

"And, as I am speaking of her, ladies, I must say, that I never in my life before was obliged to live in a house with such a downright disagreeable and unproper person; and I'm sure, I cannot think what my master could mean by sending such a woman here! There she is, in Mr. Claverham's room, at all hours; nursing him, I suppose they call it; though I can't find that she does any good, after all; for his man, poor Stephen! is almost worn to a thread with attending on him! I never go near his room, I'm sure, for it's no business of mine. Then, ladies, he sends just when he pleases for Madam Rover, and away she goes to him too: and Mr. Drywinkle declares, that he went in rather suddenly the other day, (as the door,

for a wonder, happened not to be locked,) and found them all quarrelling! But I don't believe that, not I; it's only their nasty French way of talking, so loud, and so fast, and speaking such words that nobody can understand them."

"How is Mr. Claverham?" asked Agatha, at last interrupting this unusually long oration; "is he able to get up?"

"Bless me, Miss Starinville! how should I know?" exclaimed Mrs. Rustleton, who had almost worked herself to tears by a detail of proceedings so grievous to all her ideas of propriety. "Don't I tell you, I take good care never to go near his room myself: and I declare, since these foreigners have been here, there have been so many lies told in this house, that now I don't believe one word that any body says. I'm just nobody among them; and one tells me one thing, and another assures me just the direct contrary the next minute; and sometimes, if I ask a question, (though I don't often do that,) they don't choose to

answer me at all. It was only yesterday that Stephen told me that his master's head was a great deal better, and that his arm did not seem to give him much pain—(and I believe the surgeon thinks the same, for he has never been here to-day)—and yet, ten minutes afterwards, when I only ventured to say to Mademoiselle Jaqueline, that I hoped Mr. Claverham would soon be well enough to go away, she looked at me like a tiger,—I shall never forget it, for the very sight of her made me shake all over—and she said, 'he was very ill, and should not be moved for six weeks.' To be sure! things are come to a pretty pass, when she is to play the tyrant like that over me in our own house here! I declare, I am quite miserable within doors: and now, lately, I am grown afraid of stirring out, for our Joe told me ten days ago, that there is a horde of wicked-looking gipsies come, and that they have pitched two tents down in a hollow of the common, outside the higher end of the park. One of them came to the very door here yesterday,

and, Heaven help us! if once Madam Rover, or Mademoiselle Jaqueline should take to them —(they say 'like to like,' and I'm sure she's liker to a gipsy than any thing else)—there's no manner of witchcraft and abomination that wouldn't be carried on here; for, indeed, even Mr. Drywinkle is afraid of them; and as for me, as I say, I'm just nobody among them!"

This humiliating confession of her own degradation; the enumeration of all the evil practices going on, even now, under her own eyes, and in utter defiance of her authority; and, above all, the anticipation of the nameless terrors her fancy conjured up for the future, so entirely conquered Mrs. Rustleton's spirits, that she fairly burst into tears, which thus terminated the longest harangue she had ever been known, at one effort, to attempt.

There was much in what she had said calculated to sadden the Miss Starinvilles, had their sorrow been capable of increase. As it was, they had listened to her account of the conduct of Madame de Rouvier and her maid,

with that sort of dull indifference with which those overwhelmed with some great affliction are wont to contemplate minor vexations. Their patience, indeed, began to be exhausted, when she dwelt on her alarms concerning these newly-arrived gipsies; and the tears, therefore, which abridged a recital now becoming absurd, relieved them quite as much as they did the poor narrator herself. Accordingly, with some soothing expressions, and a promise that they would converse farther with her some other time, they dismissed their honest and faithful, but wearisome attendant, and, little affected by any thing they had heard from her, sat down to peruse their packet from Rybrent.

It may readily be conceived that this occupation was not much calculated to raise or strengthen their spirits. With many intervals, however, and many tears, they at length completed a task, in the course of which, it is true that his warm expressions of friendship and affection towards themselves, threw here and there a gleam of satisfaction over the otherwise dark

portrait of hopes which they knew to be crushed, and plans for a future, which it now appeared almost criminal to have anticipated.

The next morning found Clarina really unwell, and Agatha little better. Madame de Rouvier, therefore, visited them in their apartment; and strictly charging the former not to rise, she expressed her expectation that Agatha would not leave her sister's chamber, in a tone which sounded almost like a command not to do so. At another time, Agatha's haughty spirit might have revolted at an exhortation so unnecessary; but weakened with sorrow, and languid from her own indisposition, she only coloured faintly, as she replied, "She could have no inducement to quit the only person who remained to her of those she loved." An expression of incredulity marked the glance which was Madame de Rouvier's sole reply; but, as if she had gone too far, she now professed much interest concerning them both; and her usual kindness of manner revived, as she again repeated her sense of the loss they had sustained.

However, she quickly afterwards left the apartment, and returned to it no more that morning. It was spent by Agatha and Clarina in all the sad monotony of grief; yet, as the dusk approached, and they saw no more of Madame de Rouvier, their thoughts were in some measure diverted from the subjects which chiefly engrossed them, by wonder at a change too evident not to force itself upon their attention.

"It cannot be merely her commiseration for us, as I fancied at first," said Agatha, "which has so altered her manners towards us. She must have some anxiety, or be occupied with some affairs we do not know. Can it be that she is engaging herself with Claverham? as—" but Agatha stopped, alarmed at the train of suspicions to which her surmises led. "It is very strange," at last she continued, after a pause of some time, "that this alteration in her manner should be so much more marked towards me than you!" Clarina had observed the difference to which her sister alluded, but professed herself utterly unable to imagine a

cause for it; and, after some farther conjectures, they returned to topics more interesting to them, by expressing their surprise that they should have heard or seen nothing of Trefarley that day.

"And where can Rustleton be?" said Agatha. "It seems that we are now deserted by every one!" This inquiry, however, was answered almost as soon as made, the door being opened at that moment by the person in question, who entered in all the rustling dignity of a stiff and ample, though rather rusty, black silk gown. Her other accoutrements partook of the same funereal hue; and, indeed, her whole attire manifested the respect she had wished to pay to the sorrow now reigning at Esterfield Lodge, from which place she had just returned. Actuated by real feelings of friendly sympathy, strengthened a little, no doubt, by some portion of that earnest desire which most people possess, to know precisely how the events in their neighbours' mansions have taken place, and which, in a person less sedate, might have been deemed curiosity, she had set out

that morning on a visit of condolence to Mrs. Gripskirt; taking with her, as her escort and body-guard against the formidable gipsies (the fear of whom, amid all her troubles, seemed to hold a paramount place in her mind) the foot-boy Joe, whose pusillanimity on a former occasion, it would appear, she had quite forgotten.

No opportunity, however, either of retrieving his character for valour, or of losing it irrecoverably, at this time occurred; for though Mrs. Rustleton looked carefully up and down every lane, before she would venture to cross it, and reconnoitred both sides of each hedge, before she would trust herself upon the stile that divided them, not a single gipsy could she see. It is true, she had been informed that their encampment was pitched on exactly the opposite extremity of the park from that at which she had issued, and that it must consequently lie at the distance of several miles—the extent of the estate of Warrington being very great; but when she had actually returned in safety, without beholding any object which, even at a distance, could be construed into a gipsy,

her elated dignity rose into triumph; as if those restless spirits had been controlled for her sake into quietness, as the hobgoblins of the Valley of the Shadow of Death were constrained to lie still when Mr. Fearing passed that dismal vale. Thus she scrupled not, in her own mind, to attribute their non-appearance to some secret consciousness of her presence.

Her thoughts being so occupied, the questions eagerly put to her by the Miss Starinvilles, on her entrance, at first produced no answer except in the shape of various exulting remarks concerning gipsies.

"I have often heard," she said, "that those wicked creatures do not like to meet their betters—and certainly, they have ways of finding out things that honest people have not: indeed, how else could they tell all that is to happen, by just only looking on one's hand? But yet it is very strange, to call it no worse, how they could have known that I was going to Esterfield to-day; for I never said one word about it till I bid Joe get himself ready, and

I am sure he was not two minutes in changing his coat!"

"But, pray tell us, Rustleton," exclaimed Clarina, whose patience was now utterly exhausted, "how you found poor Mrs. Gripskirt —and if you saw Mr. Trefarley — and whether—" But Clarina now hesitated, and it was a moment or two before she added—"We thought he would certainly have been here to-day!"

"Why, so he was, my dear young ladies!" cried Mrs. Rustleton, in a tone of animation so unusual, that it made them start; "So he was!" she repeated, in a still sharper key, "but he was not allowed to see you; and now, who do you think it was that sent him away? Who is it impertinent enough to take such a liberty," she added, as her wrath swelled higher and higher, "but just that sly, ill-natured, ugly Mademoiselle Jaqueline!"

"This is really very strange," said Agatha; —"How do you know it?"

"I know it very well," replied the indignant housekeeper. "I saw Mr. Trefarley myself,

after he had been here; and, to be sure, never was a person so altered. He was looking so very pale and unhappy; and, no doubt, he was very angry, though he did not choose to say so. But he told me he had wished much to see you to-day, (I believe the funeral is to be to-morrow,) but that you had not had time to admit him. Bless me! said I, they must have had plenty of time to-day to see you; but Miss Clarina was ill this morning, and perhaps she was not up. Miss Starinville, however, would have been glad of your visit, I 'm very sure: and then his face, that was so pale before, grew quite scarlet with anger. He persisted in it, however, that he had sent up word that he could wait as long as you wished; but that you had returned for answer that you would not trouble him to wait, for you could not see him. I was very much surprised; but he would not stay to hear what I was going to ask, but only begged I would let you know that he would call again to-morrow, and hoped you would then allow him an interview. I stayed some time longer

with poor Mrs. Gripskirt; for, to be sure, it is very lonesome for her there, now that Miss De Cruce is dead, and Mr. Rybrent gone away—and Mr. Trefarley is going away too, she says, as soon as the funeral is over."

"But was it Jaqueline who gave that message to him?" cried Agatha; "does he not know she is not an attendant of ours? How could he believe what she said? Why did he not insist upon seeing some one else?"

"He never saw her at all," answered Mrs. Rustleton, perplexed by questions which followed each other too closely to allow her intellect (unused as it was to the art of explaining either rapidly or distinctly) to devise any other reply.

"Then it is, after all, but a fancy of yours, to attribute this strange mistake to Jaqueline," retorted Agatha, with some displeasure.

"I have no fancy, as you call it, about the matter, Miss Starinville," replied Mrs. Rustleton, resuming all her usual dignity, and speaking very slow. "I spoke to Phœbe about

it, as was my duty, as soon as I returned home; and she told me herself, that Mademoiselle Jaqueline waited for her on the stairs, and bid her go down, and say these very words I have told you; and because the poor girl did not obey her immediately, for indeed she wanted to run and see you herself, Mademoiselle Jaqueline took her by the arm, and looked at her so spitefully, that she was quite terrified, and dared not refuse to do whatever she was bid."

"But where was Geoffry, or Madame de Rouvier?" asked Agatha eagerly; "was there no one but Phœbe in the house to see Mr. Trefarley?"

"Mr. Drywinkle unluckily was gone out to the stables," answered Mrs. Rustleton, "and did not return till there was no chance of his overtaking Mr. Trefarley, who had rode away, Phœbe said, as hard as ever he could gallop. As for Madam Rover, she was then, I suppose, where Mr. Drywinkle tells me she has been all day, with Mr. Claverham."

Mrs. Rustleton stopped; but Agatha and Clarina were both too much disturbed to speak; and after some pause, the housekeeper continued, "I could not blame Phœbe much, for what between that Frenchwoman, and Mr. Drywinkle, the poor creature was almost scared to death. No wonder, indeed, that Mr. Drywinkle was in a perilous passion; I am only surprised he did not go up directly to your room himself, as Phœbe says he threatened he would. But when I came home, I pacified him as well as I could, and promised I would tell you all about it, and ask you if Mr. Trefarley is to be turned away from the house again in this manner by that sly serpent, as Mr. Drywinkle always calls her?"

"No, certainly!" cried both the Miss Starinvilles at once; but they felt too much agitated to enter into farther discussion of the matter with her at present; and therefore, charging her only to bid Geoffry watch for Mr. Trefarley's arrival next day, and to take care that he was admitted to them, they now

dismissed her. It was some minutes after she had left them before either of them spoke.

"This is all very extraordinary!" remarked Agatha, in a tone of mingled surprise and indignation, while the colour that mounted to her cheek showed that the latter was the predominant feeling. 'It was impossible Jaqueline herself could have any concern in preventing us from seeing Mr. Trefarley; she must have acted by the command of her mistress. But what motive can possibly have induced Madame de Rouvier to venture on so strange, so unfeeling a prohibition? Does she mean thus to prevent us from seeing the only real friend we have left, that we may be utterly in her power, and unable even to remonstrate against the very improper conduct which, by Rustleton's account, it seems, she has herself adopted? Surely she cannot suppose she is to assume a control like this?"

"We must not be too hasty to believe all Rustleton's assertions," replied Clarina, in a conciliatory manner, as she perceived that her sister's

anger rose as she spoke. "She is so blinded by the prejudices which, you know, she has always entertained against Madame de Rouvier and Jaqueline, that, without any intention, on her part, of falsehood, her descriptions of their conduct cannot fairly be credited. She says, you may observe that she never goes near Mr. Claverham's room herself; so, how should she so certainly know that Madame de Rouvier and Jaqueline are always with him? After all, perhaps she only magnifies the friendly attentions which, we must remember, their foreign customs authorize, into the incessant attendance she describes."

"Then, where has Madame de Rouvier been all day?" interrupted Agatha, with some vehemence; "she has certainly not been with us; and do you disbelieve Geoffry also, for it seems that Rustleton derived her information on that head from him? It is not the first time," Agatha continued, while her voice gradually dropped till it became very low, "that I have fancied that Leonard possesses an influence

over Madame de Rouvier as unseemly, I think, as it is strange." She paused; and Clarina, who had never watched Claverham's conduct towards any one but Rybrent with the slightest interest, and who had therefore never perceived any signs of the secret understanding between him and Madame de Rouvier, which had not escaped Agatha's more eager penetration, now answered in a dejected and half reproachful tone:

"Nay, dearest Agatha, we have surely real sorrows enough to occupy our minds, without giving entrance to suspicions so revolting and injurious, on no better foundation than the prejudiced opinions of that well-meaning but weak woman. Totally ignorant as she is of foreign customs, she judges harshly of the attentions which Madame de Rouvier, without any thought of incurring censure, may, merely from the habits of her country, pay to Leonard in his present suffering condition; and, as for your own suspicions, Agatha, surely, in the vexed state of your mind, you deceive

yourself; at least, I have certainly never before heard you express even a hint of such a nature."

"I have, truly, not much encouragement to disclose my thoughts to you again," cried Agatha peevishly. "When I both liked and admired Madame de Rouvier more than you did, you always repressed my sentiments about her by some cold remark; while now, that I confide to you opinions better grounded than you seem to fancy, you reproach me for entertaining 'revolting and injurious suspicions,' as you call them."

"Alas!" replied Clarina, much distressed, "she is now the only companion (friend, I fear, I must not call her,) that we have left: and surely, dear Agatha, I may well shrink from believing evil like this of her, while a possibility of refusing assent to it remains?"

Agatha, touched at seeing the tears which now rolled down Clarina's cheek so fast as to impede her farther speech, and shocked at having caused them, hastily embraced her, and by

softened words and manner sought to repair the effects of her own impetuous disposition; and Clarina soon checked her feelings, and replied with affection to her sister's endearments.

CHAPTER II.

The minds of both the Miss Starinvilles were, however, too deeply engrossed by the subject they had been discussing, to allow of any permanent change of topic. Agatha, indeed, appeared unwilling to resume it; but Clarina at length broke the silence which had prevailed between them for some time, by saying,

"We must be greatly on our guard at present, Agatha, and we must not forget all Rybrent's cautions, since we can now only look to our own prudence for the guidance of our conduct. Madame de Rouvier's French manners, even supposing her intentions to be good, are not such as we ought to adopt. But let us speak to her about Leonard the first time we see her, and ask when he is likely to be able to bear

removal. He would not surely wish to stay longer than his wounds render it necessary; and you do not imagine that she desires to keep him here, do you?"

"I would not," replied Agatha, colouring, "judge of her unfairly, and I certainly do not know what her desires or intentions are. But we will speak as you propose. Do you not, however, allow that her preventing us from seeing Mr. Trefarley to-day was a very strange proceeding?"

"I cannot but think," answered Clarina, "it must have been altogether some odd mistake. I believe, Jaqueline's English is but very indifferent, and Phœbe may easily have misunderstood both her meaning and her words."

"But what business could she have to send any message to Mr. Trefarley at all?" inquired Agatha. "Why did she wait for Phœbe, or prevent her from coming to our room?"

"Nay," replied Clarina, "I am indeed puzzled to account for any of this. No doubt, it is very strange!"

Both sisters were now for some time silent. At

length, however, Clarina again addressed her sister, saying—"Do tell me, dearest Agatha, whether you really ever did observe any thing in Leonard's conduct towards Madame de Rouvier, which might justify your present suspicions?" Agatha accordingly began now to detail the circumstances to which she had before alluded; but the facts she described seemed, even to herself, as she related them, so trivial, while the eager penetration which had discovered them, together with the ingenuity used in drawing such inferences from them, betrayed so plainly some interest on her own part in the matter, that, aware of the impression she might thus be creating, Agatha coloured deeper and deeper as she proceeded, while Clarina listened with grave and silent attention, which appeared to become every moment more oppressive to the speaker.

"There is no use whatever," cried Agatha at last, abruptly breaking off her relation, "in my mentioning this. You might have observed it all yourself."

"No, indeed, Agatha," answered Clarina, "I

never watched Mr. Claverham half so narrowly!" Her gravity was increased almost to solemnity as she said this. There was a sorrow too in her manner, which so checked the displeasure her speech had excited, that Agatha, though dissatisfied both with herself and her sister, sat silent; and Clarina being now as little inclined for discourse, both remained absorbed in painful reflections.

The evening was far advanced, and they sat in the uncertain light which the dull glimmer of their fire afforded, while each leaning back in near, but opposite chairs, could only see the outline of each other's form, when the door suddenly opening, the light which entered the apartment showed the cheeks of both streaming with tears, perhaps more painful than any they had yet shed. Both started up, for it was Madame de Rouvier who entered, and whose light, they thought, glanced on a figure behind her; but she closed the door rather hurriedly, and advanced towards them. She looked disturbed, and, placing her candle on the table, sat down

without speaking. Agatha was the first to break the pause. The sight of Madame de Rouvier, come, perhaps, at that moment from Claverham's apartment, revived, while it seemed also to justify, all her suspicions. Nor could she even fancy that she beheld Jaqueline, (whose form she supposed was that they had dimly seen,) without a recollection so acute of the strange conduct recently pursued towards Mr. Trefarley, that her spirits, lately depressed and embarrassed, were now once more roused into indignation. Yet her tone, though firm, was gentle, as, addressing Madame de Rouvier, she said, " Clarina and I have been much surprised, and, I must own, much displeased also, with Jaqueline's behaviour today."

" With Jaqueline!" interrupted Madame de Rouvier, starting up in anger: " Have you seen her?"

" No," replied Agatha, surprised at this sudden vehemence; " I do not mean, of course,

that she has personally offended us; but I think you must know, that the message by which she chose to send Mr. Trefarley from the door this morning, in our names—"

Agatha could not proceed, for Madame de Rouvier, again interrupting her, exclaimed,

"Has Mr. Trefarley been here, then, to-day?"

Clarina, now confirmed in her former opinion, that the whole must have proceeded from some mistake, detailed minutely to Madame de Rouvier all the particulars (of course, divested of her comments) which they had received from Mrs. Rustleton, and finished by expressing the deep regret they had felt, at being thus prevented from learning from Mr. Trefarley the details they had wished to hear. But Madame de Rouvier scarcely seemed to listen to this conclusion, while she murmured slowly, "Jaqueline could have had no interest herself in this—could it have been Mr. Claverham's— ?" She paused an instant.

Whether she would have proceeded remained

uncertain; for Agatha, in a tone of anger, which seemed immediately to arouse her, suddenly exclaimed,—"Mr. Claverham, do you say? Surely, Madame de Rouvier, Mr. Claverham cannot imagine he may thus assume authority over either our servants or yours?"

Madame de Rouvier coloured very highly, but she was now evidently again on her guard; and resuming all her native ease and elegance of manner, she answered, in a winning tone, "Really, my dear Miss Starinville, when any very foolish mistake occurs, one is apt, for want of a better perhaps, to imagine some very unaccountable cause for it. I hope, therefore, you will not expect me to give you any more profound reason for having mentioned Mr. Claverham's name in my surmises; though, no doubt, he could have had nothing whatever to do with the business. But I will learn the truth from Jaqueline herself, who, I dare say, never in reality knew that Mr. Trefarley was come, nor meant to say any thing to Phœbe

about him. But she is so incorrigibly stupid about learning English, that I almost despair of ever making her either understand it, or speak three words of it intelligibly.

Agatha looked dissatisfied still, but, a little ashamed of the vehemence she had displayed, she did not reply; while Clarina acquiesced easily in the idea she had herself before entertained. She however resolved to speak immediately, as she and Agatha had agreed, concerning Claverham's removal; and she therefore now inquired about the state he was in, and mildly, but seriously, expressed her own and her sister's wish that he should depart to his own house as soon as such a change could be made without injury to him, "which, I should think," concluded Clarina, "must very speedily be the case, as I understand he is already so much better that the surgeon is beginning to omit his daily visits."

Notwithstanding Madame de Rouvier's habitual self-possession, her cheek alternately glowed with crimson, or was overspread with deadly

paleness, while Clarina spoke; thus manifesting a conflict within, which neither her words, however, nor her manner, betrayed. For these remarks and this request she was indeed evidently prepared, though the embarrassment of her task seemed increased by the calm sincerity of Clarina's address; and though a shade of displeasure, the only definite expression in her face, as the latter mentioned her knowledge of the surgeon's absence that day, proved that she had not expected them to be quite so well-informed.

"It is but ten days, my dear Clarina," she said, with a placid smile and tone greatly at variance with the emotion her changing cheek had just displayed, "that Mr. Claverham received a most dangerous wound in his head, and broke his left arm severely. So much, indeed, has occurred since, that you may well imagine the interval longer, or you would not, I presume, fancy it possible to remove him so quickly as you seem to expect. He is, indeed, still in a very precarious situation;" and she

now drew an almost alarming picture of the effects of the wound on his head, and of his present sufferings and weakness; though she allowed that his arm was recovering rapidly, and attributed to that circumstance the less frequent attendance of the surgeon, who had announced, she said, that time and total quietness were chiefly necessary to secure him from the more serious consequences to be apprehended from the injury he had received in his head. "But why," continued she, in a more lively and half-laughing strain, "have you taken such a sudden and earnest desire for his removal? You are not afraid that wounded heads and broken arms are contagious, are you?"

Clarina's wishes for his departure, sufficiently strong before, were now founded on reasons too painful to allow of the smile which this playful remark might otherwise have forced from her; yet, not being such as she could allege, she hesitated for an answer, when she was relieved by Agatha, who had been discom-

fited, but not convinced, by Madame de Rouvier's excuses concerning Mr. Trefarley, and who fancied she could discover a degree of personal interest in her arguments for Claverham's continuance in the house, which tempted her to interrupt Clarina's broken sentences, by saying calmly, but firmly,

"We do not certainly wish, Madame de Rouvier, to endanger Mr. Claverham's health by removing him; but the customs of England do not authorize, nor do our wishes sanction, his stay here longer than is absolutely necessary; though," Agatha added with a smile somewhat sarcastic, "I am not surprised you should be at a loss to understand this feeling, since I believe the habits of France in those points are very different."

"We French people," replied Madame de Rouvier, with the gentlest accent and manner, "are not given certainly to suspect evil, merely because its existence is possible. The customs of every country are however, of course, founded on good reasons, and you are surely

right in desiring to be governed by yours. With us, on the other hand, it would appear so natural, and so perfectly innocent (if not even praiseworthy), to afford an apartment to a man suffering, like Mr. Claverham, from so severe and sudden an accident, that no one would think of drawing any evil conclusions from it. But you must judge much better than I can of the way in which such a transaction is considered here, and you do well to be guided by that. I suppose, however, you would not have him removed till it can be done with some safety, which is certainly not the case at present ?"

Madame de Rouvier's apparent acquiescence in their wishes, and yet the unpleasing light in which she contrived to place a request which their own feelings, as well as the earnest advice of Miss De Cruce and Rybrent, had induced them thus anxiously to press, completely baffled both the sisters. Though prepared for opposition or remonstrance, they had not expected compliance and ridicule, and they remained for some minutes silent; while Madame de Rouvier,

as if to profit by the advantage she had gained, observed, "It would be hardly fair for us to judge each other by the contrary custom of our different countries. Perhaps, while I wonder at the prevalence of suspicion among you, which makes you so averse to give shelter in your house to a wounded man, you may be as much surprised if I tell you that, in accordance to our habits, I frequently visit his room to inquire after him. What do you think of such a confession?" The smile with which she asked this but ill accorded with the keen inquiry in her eye, as she scanned the faces of those she addressed. No surprise was there, nor did she probably expect it, since she must have been well aware that the transactions she thus wished to have the merit of appearing to disclose, were already known to them. But while Clarina's mild yet grave countenance, by its very simplicity, baffled her, there was a cast of scorn on Agatha's more lofty features, which pleased her still less. The latter, however, did not speak; but Clarina at once replied,

"We cannot venture to pronounce any cen-

sure on the habits of your country, though, perhaps, we think it might be better to conform, in the present instance, to the customs sanctioned here. With regard to Mr. Claverham's safe removal, I suppose we had better be guided by the surgeon's opinion; and when that shall be satisfactory, I hope you will then allow us to urge that the change may immediately be made."

Madame de Rouvier appeared to shrink from Clarina's gentle but decided manner; but she only replied, "Certainly!" and all three sat for some minutes silent, till, as she rose to go away, she said,

"I had almost forgotten the chief purport of my visit, which was, to press you to leave your apartment, and inhabit the library as usual." She addressed this chiefly to Clarina; and Agatha, little pleased with all that had passed, remarked sharply, "I suppose you mean both of us together, Madame de Rouvier? You did not seem very desirous this morning that I should leave my room."

"I shall be happy to see you both," she an-

swered coldly, as she retired towards the door ; but, perceiving that she was about to leave them in total darkness, she again advanced, and resuming her usual manner, as if anxious to remove any unpleasant impression, she cried gaily, " I cannot really leave you in this utter gloom—even the very fire has departed. Let me ring for lights !"

CHAPTER III.

Madame de Rouvier rang the bell as she spoke, and employed the interval till the summons was answered in expressing much kindness towards them both, and in making inquiries concerning Clarina's indisposition, which she had before apparently forgotten. A loud and shrill scream in the passage, followed by a heavy fall, and a scuffling noise, like hasty footsteps rushing by their door, suddenly interrupted her, and both the Miss Starinvilles, much startled, hastened with her to ascertain what had happened.

At the end of the passage lay Phœbe, sprawling at full length, and either so hurt or so terrified, that for some moments they could not induce her to speak. No one else, however, was

to be seen, and again, therefore, they redoubled their inquiries to learn what had befallen her. They soon found she was somewhat hurt, as well as greatly alarmed, with her fall; but discovering that she had received no serious injury, they urged her afresh to relate what had caused her stumble and her fright.

"I did not tumble," she answered at last. "Somebody knocked me down so hard, I certainly thought I was killed."

"Who was it, Phœbe?" cried Agatha and Clarina, both in a breath, and almost as much terrified as herself; while Madame de Rouvier looked also alarmed and anxious for her reply.

"I don't know who it was," answered the poor girl, half crying; "at least, I could not see; though, to be sure, I can guess—" but she looked at Madame de Rouvier, and stopped short.

"Nay! tell us, I beseech you!" exclaimed the latter, "if you really know. But how came you not to see; had you no candle?"

For a moment the girl remained silent, as if endeavouring to recall her senses, scattered by

the suddenness of her accident; but the Miss Starinvilles repeating the latter question, she pointed to the open door of a room behind her, and said, "She snatched the candle out of my hand and threw it in there;" and, truly enough, there lay the candlestick and its shattered contents upon the floor.

"But after all," continued the girl slowly, and as if on farther reflection, "I do not really believe it could have been her. I do think—" but she stopped, shuddering, as if the new surmise were infinitely more horrible than the former one.

"Whom can you mean, and what is it you think, Phœbe?" demanded Agatha, with eager curiosity and alarm. Phœbe again looked round on Madame de Rouvier as she said,

"Why, certainly, I meant Mademoiselle Jaqueline at first; but indeed, now I come to think of it, I do not believe it was her. I do think—I am almost sure, I saw some bright scarlet.—Young ladies, let us get into your room, and lock the door, and then I will tell you all about it."

As if suddenly infected with her fear, they

all now hurried together into the apartment the Miss Starinvilles had left. They had scarcely reached it, however, before the two latter, as well as Madame de Rouvier, seemed ashamed of so silly a panic; but poor Phœbe, on the contrary, locked the door in a tremour, which proved her fear was rather increasing than diminishing; and then turning round, with a face pale as ashes, she whispered in a low voice, "I believe the gipsies have got into the house." The Miss Starinvilles now became as pale as herself, and Madame de Rouvier started in evident alarm.

"Ring the bell, Clarina!" cried Agatha, "while I will call from this window. It is possible Geoffry may hear me!" As she spoke, she advanced towards the window and endeavoured to throw up the sash.

"Stay, stay! for heaven's sake, Miss Starinville!" exclaimed Madame de Rouvier. "Let us hear more, before we create such an alarm as this! Phœbe may be mistaken: at all events, the door is secured, and therefore we may at

least safely listen to her story before we raise such a disturbance."

Clarina, though trembling from head to foot, acquiesced in the expediency of this proposal; and accordingly Agatha reluctantly quitted the window.

They now again gathered round Phœbe, whose story was briefly this:

She was about to take some coals to Madame de Rouvier's apartment, when she heard the Miss Starinvilles' bell. She however proceeded to accomplish the errand she had already begun, and then hastened with all speed towards her young mistress's room. This accounted for her appearance at that end of the passage, which, though communicating with the gallery where Madame de Rouvier's apartment lay, was exactly opposite to the point whence any one would appear coming from below. This probably was well known to the person, whoever it might be, waiting there, and who had retreated to that end perhaps for the very purpose of avoiding the encounter which took place so dis-

astrously for poor Phœbe. However that might be, it appeared from her tale, that she had no sooner opened the door above mentioned, which she did in great haste, than the candle was suddenly snatched from her hand by some person standing there, and instantly thrown over her head into the room behind her, while a violent push sent her headlong to the floor with such force as to bruise her considerably.

"And then the villain ran away as fast as he could along the passage," continued Phœbe, trembling more and more. "He must have passed this very door!—Pray, ladies, let me call to Mr. Drywinkle from the window! I am quite certain the gipsies are in the house!"

"What should the gipsies be doing here, simple girl?" cried Madame de Rouvier, you would be more likely to find them at the hen-roost! Jaqueline must have been going to my room, and may have run against you accidentally; and in the fright of your fall you must have imagined the rest, Phœbe!"

"No, Madam Rover," replied Phœbe, "I am

certain it was not Mademoiselle Jaqueline, though, I own, I thought of her at first. But I'm quite sure I saw something like the scarlet jacket one of those gipsies wears. Besides, she never could have knocked me down so very hard: and, indeed, why should she?"

Agatha and Clarina both grew deadly pale, as they now recollected, and by an almost involuntary glance reminded each other, that they had seen a figure behind Madame de Rouvier as she had entered their apartment that evening. They looked towards her with an expression of suspicion and fear, which could hardly have failed to offend her had she seen it; but her eyes were fixed on the ground, and it were hard to say whether it was embarrassment or fear which had blanched her cheek almost to snowy whiteness.

"Who was it that followed you to our door, Madame de Rouvier?" demanded Agatha, with all the abruptness both of fright and anger: "My sister and I saw somebody behind you."

The whole tide of Madame de Rouvier's blood rushed again to her face; yet when, after a moment's interval, she spoke, her voice and manner were calm and collected. "I hardly remember," she said, "but I think Jaqueline was with me then; and I suppose she went below, and was returning to her apartment, when Phœbe, who, by her own account, was coming at full speed, must have run against her: and it is no great marvel that both she and her candle met with the catastrophe which her terror has magnified into such a wonderful tale."

"But if it were Jaqueline," asked Clarina, in a trembling voice, "why should she have run away? We certainly heard the steps, as Phœbe says, pass by our door!"

"Let me go and ascertain the truth of all this!" cried Madame de Rouvier, in a gay tone, and with a smile of incredulity. "I am afraid of neither gipsies nor ghosts; and as for the real delinquent, Jaqueline, she will have more cause to fear my approach than I have to

dread hers; for I shall certainly reprimand her sharply for her utter want of civility, indeed of humanity, in leaving poor Phœbe on the floor, without either assistance or apology. Indeed, I can only suppose she was herself in haste, and was not aware of the extent of the mischief she had done."

This excuse for Jaqueline was scarcely heard by the Miss Starinvilles, so engrossed were they by their fears of the vagrants; Phœbe's assertions having half convinced them that they were really in the house,—and of Madame de Rouvier herself, about whom suspicions, vague, it is true, but strange and alarming, were floating in their minds. They were roused, however, from these thoughts, by seeing her about to unlock the door; while Phœbe, positively screaming with terror, exclaimed, "Don't open the door, Madam Rover! don't open it, for heaven's sake! We shall all be murdered! I dare say, the passage is full of them!"

Agatha and Clarina also, in tremulous accents, entreated her to desist. But she now exerted all

the powers of her ridicule so successfully in mocking at the extreme folly of such fears, that at length ashamed, if not convinced, they were silent. "You may lock yourselves all in when I go," she concluded, perceiving that she had gained her point; "and, you may be sure, I will soon return with all the forces of the house, if I find there has been any real cause for apprehension. But if Phœbe and Jaqueline appear only to have run up against one another, I dare say, Mrs. Rustleton will be protection enough."

An unexpected difficulty now arose. They had but one candle, that carried by Phœbe having been left smashed in pieces on the floor.

"I am not at all afraid of exploring the way to my own room without one," cried Madame de Rouvier, in a laughing tone, "for two such disasters can hardly happen in one night. I shall easily get a light there, and will then proceed to inquire into this very formidable story." She waited for no more remonstrances, but unlocking the door, left the room, closing it immediately behind her. Phœbe instantly darted to-

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wards it; and while she locked and bolted it with redoubled care, she observed, in a low whisper,

"If she did not know well enough who it is that was lurking there, she would not be so mighty bold!"

A cold chill overspread the Miss Starinvilles as they thus heard the suspicion, they scarcely had dared to whisper, expressed in open words. They imposed silence on Phœbe, however, with some marks of displeasure; but while she stood close to the door, watching it with as much anxiety as if she expected that, without such vigilance, the bolts would undraw of themselves; the tiptoe-attitude of caution in which her young mistresses remained, a few paces farther off, showed that their whole souls (rather than their ears only) were directed to the same point, and it might have been difficult to determine in which of the three, signs of suspicion and terror were most manifest.

A light step now approaching the door, made them all shrink back; but the next moment

they recognized Madame de Rouvier's voice, while she cried, in a laughing tone, as she passed, " There are no gipsies, scarlet, blue, or yellow, in my room ; so I have got a light, and am going down-stairs !"

" I do assure you, ladies," said Phœbe, in a low and solemn tone, as she beheld in the Miss Starinvilles' faces some marks of returning confidence at this gay asseveration, " that I told you nothing but the truth. I was wilfully knocked down, I am ready to swear, by some villain lurking in that passage; and it was not Mademoiselle Jaqueline,—it was some person much stouter and stronger, and dressed very differently." She paused, but neither Agatha nor Clarina replied. Rybrent's doubts of Madame de Rouvier, Trefarley's suspicions,—even the mild and charitable Miss De Cruce's cautions—their own remarks on the evident change that had taken place in her since their friends were all removed—the impropriety of her conduct towards Claverham, with the desire which,

notwithstanding all her artifices, she plainly manifested to retain him in the house, and, above all, the suspicious courage with which she now ventured alone to explore dangers, which, no doubt, she knew menaced not herself—all these considerations, with the rapidity of lightning, darted through the Miss Starinvilles' minds. With these, it must be owned, flashed various vague remembrances of the atrocities committed by her countrywomen—of the former fears of the domestics, till their fancies were so heated, and their terror wrought to such a pitch, that when, after a short time, the steps of more than one person were heard advancing towards the door, starting from their position, they both uttered a faint exclamation; and, flying to the other end of the room, covered their faces with their hands, as if unable to look on what they might have to encounter.

Indeed, with the light step of Madame de Rouvier was plainly to be distinguished a slow and heavy tread, which might have sounded suspiciously even to other ears. But they cer-

tainly heard it not long; for Phœbe, terrified out of all her remaining courage by their sudden movement, immediately echoed their slight ejaculation by a succession of screams, each higher and shriller than the last, till the uproar she thus produced almost entirely drowned the noise at the door, where the knocking grew every moment louder and more eager. Her shrieks, however, brought the Miss Starinvilles to their senses; and Agatha, rousing her natural courage, now advanced towards the door, and sharply commanded her to cease.

"For heaven's sake, open the door!" was now heard in Madame de Rouvier's voice, "and tell us what in the world has happened!" A few words, in a lower tone, seemed addressed to some one near her; and all Agatha's suspicions reviving at the idea of her having brought some accomplice with her, she cried in a spirited and angry tone, "No, Madame de Rouvier! We cannot admit you till we know who it is we are convinced you have with you!"

"How perfectly absurd, Miss Starinville!" ex-

claimed Madame de Rouvier, in a tone of indignation they had never yet heard from her.—" But I cannot really stoop to this! Mrs. Rustleton, pray speak to the Miss Starinvilles yourself; I can have no wish for admission to them;" and they heard her walk away.

" Dear ladies," cried Mrs. Rustleton, " I hope you will open the door and tell me what has made you scream so?" Suddenly and deeply ashamed, the Miss Starinvilles instantly complied with her demand; and Mrs. Rustleton entered in all the dignity of her black accoutrements, and with an air at once of curiosity and protection.

The screams were then justly laid to Phœbe's charge, and the Miss Starinvilles accounted for their own fears, which they did not attempt to conceal, by an account of what had occurred, in which they very faithfully gave Phœbe's version of the story. But they found that Mrs. Rustleton's understanding had already received its impression; and as it was never easy to imprint any very distinct notions there, so

it was always proportionably hard to efface them. She was, in fact, still labouring with the thoughts of the awe which, she was convinced, had that morning influenced these gipsies to avoid her presence. That they should venture to enter the house, then, was incredible. All that part of the affair, therefore, she utterly scouted. Madame de Rouvier had just brought Mademoiselle Jaqueline down to her room. "And, to be sure," she continued, "I had some pleasure in hearing that proud creature well scolded for her awkwardness and rudeness; and Madam Rover said she should make an apology to Phœbe, if I pleased; but I thought she was humbled enough; so I only said, I hoped she would not be so careless again; and then she really made me one of her French curtsies, and said she was very sorry; and, indeed, all her pride seemed to be come out of her; and so I was mollified, and came away with Madam Rover here, and very much frightened I was to hear that foolish girl's screams."

Such was Mrs. Rustleton's view of the mat-

ter, nor was it possible to change it; though, to Phœbe's asseverations, that no one ran against her, but that she was knocked wilfully down, and the candle taken from her, she did so far yield as to say, " It was likely enough, for all Mademoiselle Jaqueline's civility just now, that she did it on purpose; for she is as spiteful as she is proud, and I dare say she owed you a grudge for not obeying her more quickly this morning."

All this satisfied Phœbe but little, though she did not venture to contradict Mrs. Rustleton farther: but the continued firmness of this dull, but, perhaps, rational disbelief, so far calmed the Miss Starinvilles, that they began to reflect with much pain on the suspicions they had not only fostered, but had betrayed. They felt they had offended Madame de Rouvier, and they owned internally that she had just cause for anger.

Meantime, Mrs. Rustleton was bestirring herself with slow dignity in arranging the room, and issuing orders to Phœbe of vari-

ous kinds; but when she proceeded to command her to fetch wood to re-light the fire, the poor girl positively refused to venture down the stairs by herself, and remonstrances, arguments, and even threats, were in vain. At length the Miss Starinvilles interfered. It was now so late, they said, they should be glad to retire to rest immediately; and accordingly they dismissed both their attendants, after a short time, with as much outward calmness as Mrs. Rustleton's phlegmatic incredulity could desire. They did, indeed, secretly wish they could have had some one to watch in their chamber through the night; but, ashamed and distressed at the scene which had occurred, they did not even hint at such a desire; and having closed their door, and fastened it with every precaution which prudence and terror could suggest, they sought the repose which, however, the morning's dawn still found them courting in vain. But daylight, if it did not calm their sorrows, at least allayed their fears, and afforded them at last an hour of tranquil sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

"We ought," said Clarina to her sister the next morning, "to apologize to Madame de Rouvier for our conduct towards her last night. Whatever excuse we may have for our suspicions, we should not certainly have displayed distrust so offensive. Really, Phœbe's story was so strange and improbable too, that I begin to believe she must have been deceived by her fears; and if the case were truly as Rustleton as well as Madame de Rouvier represented, our demeanour towards the latter was surely unjustifiable!" Agatha agreed with her sister; and they now determined to send a request to Madame de Rouvier, either to allow them to come to her, or to visit them in their apartment.

For this purpose, Clarina was about to ring the bell, when a slight knock at the door arrested her hand, and was instantly followed by the entrance of Madame de Rouvier herself. Advancing towards them with an air of cordial good-humour, she told them that, having met Mrs. Rustleton on the stairs, and finding from her that they were risen and dressed, she had come to inquire after them, and hoped to find they had not seriously suffered from the fright and agitation of the preceding night. Touched and abashed at a frankness and cordiality they felt as if they had not deserved, both now murmured excuses and regrets, which, however, Madame de Rouvier quickly cut short, protesting that she would not hear another word of apology for the involuntary mistakes of terror; "And certainly your alarm last night was as pitiable," she continued, "as, in the weak state of your spirits, it was excusable. But let us talk no more of such a trifling matter," she added with a smile, as she affectionately pressed the hands she still held.

" Will you leave your room, as I proposed last night, and breakfast with me in the library?" The Miss Starinvilles felt that their shattered spirits still needed the repose of solitude; but they yielded to her wishes, and expressed their readiness to follow her. They now expected her to lead the way to the room she mentioned, which was situated on the same floor, and which (having preferred on account of its superior lightness) she and the Miss Starinvilles had chiefly inhabited since her arrival at Warrington. But she still lingered in their room. " This ready acquiescence," at last she said, " is very kind, and it will give me much pleasure to find you once more my companions. For the last day or two," she added, with a slight hesitation, " poor Mr. Claverham has been able occasionally to move there, as a little relief from the sameness of his bed-room, which, you know, is very near it; and I dare say you will not object to his continuing that practice, even while we are there;" and, as if she considered their assent too certain to require any

answer, she moved towards the door. But the Miss Starinvilles were thunderstruck at a proposal which so plainly manifested that, notwithstanding the alarming description she had so recently given them concerning him, Leonard's convalescence was in reality even much farther advanced than they had imagined. Clarina shrunk from the idea of renewing so hastily an intercourse between him and her sister, which she began almost unconsciously to dread; while Agatha's chief sentiment was indignation at the effrontery shown by Madame de Rouvier, in thus stipulating for Claverham's presence, at a moment when their spirits, so grievously wounded by their recent loss, were scarcely able to support even her own society.

She perceived, however, that an immediate answer to this strange proposition was necessary; for Madame de Rouvier had already opened the door, and was waiting for their advance; and she exclaimed, with a firm and even haughty mien, "No, Madame de Rou-

vier; if you wish for Mr. Claverham's company in the library, in addition to the visits which, you tell us, you pay to his chamber, you must dispense with ours. We have too recently lost our earliest friend to feel equal to society, in which indeed, were it otherwise, we should not wish to mix under such circumstances." Agatha's voice had faltered a little during the latter sentence; but there was still haughtiness in her eye, and resolution in her erect attitude. Whether Madame de Rouvier was prepared for this refusal, or whether she really felt her proposal to be a matter of indifference, and did not observe either the anger or the scorn it had awakened, it was not easy to determine; while, in a mild tone, and with an unaltered countenance, she replied,

"No doubt you may avoid seeing Mr. Claverham, as you wish it so much. I will send to request him not to enter the library to-day. But come, let us go together to breakfast!" Again she held the door open; but Clarina, greatly gratified at finding her sister's judgment so con-

sonant to her own, now remarked, "We had better, I think, breakfast in the drawing-room below. If Leonard finds relief in changing his room, he ought not to be deprived of the library; and there is no difficulty in our going down-stairs." An ambiguous expression crossed Madame de Rouvier's face; but it was ridicule which curled her lip, as she replied, "Why, truly, the drawing-room may be the best. You will then not even see Mr. Claverham's door, which you must actually have passed in going to the library! But I will go and make this fresh arrangement, by ordering the breakfast to be taken below—I will then return and fetch you." They had no time to answer, before she had closed the door on them and was gone. Her tone of ridicule had offended them both; but Agatha's displeasure at her avowed and familiar intercourse with Claverham effaced all other considerations; while Clarina, both surprised and pleased at her sister's spirited and instant refusal of his society, was just about to express these feelings, when Madame de Rou-

vier again appeared at their door, and with her usual grace and a tone of kindness, invited them to descend with her to the drawing-room, where breakfast was now ordered, " And where," she continued, " we will pass our morning in all the quietness and seclusion you so naturally desire."

They followed as she led the way down the stairs. No one was in sight but Jaqueline, who, joining them in the passage, attended them and her mistress down the great staircase to the door of the drawing-room. There they were met by Geoffry, who, though he glared a look of fury upon Mademoiselle Jaqueline, whose presence he seemed to consider as an impertinent intrusion (a light in which, it must be owned, he was at all times willing to view it), yet greeted his young mistresses with a sad but cordial smile, and one of his profoundest bows. As he again raised his head, Mademoiselle Jaqueline was gone ; and this appearing to complete his satisfaction, he threw the door open for their entrance, and discovered the breakfast

laid with his utmost care. Both Agatha and Clarina spoke a few kind words to him, which so elated his spirits, that, utterly regardless of Madame de Rouvier's presence, he suddenly exclaimed, "You may safely depend upon me, my dear young ladies! I will watch well to-day, as you desired, for Mr. Trefarley, and will see that he is not served again as he was yesterday!" Both the Miss Starinvilles coloured at an assurance which thus betrayed to Madame de Rouvier the suspicions they had formed, and the charge they had given. No one spoke, however; and Mr. Drywinkle, as if awakened by their silence to some sense of his own imprudence, rather hastily quitted the room.

Madame de Rouvier now called their attention to the various, and indeed evident alterations she had made in this apartment since they had seen it last. "I was weary of my solitude," she continued, "during your absence at Esterfield, and amused myself with these changes, which, I hope, you will deem improvements." She

pointed out, as she spoke, the details of her management; which had, in fact, so altered the appearance of the room, as to make it appear almost new to the Miss Starinvilles. The antique looking-glass had not only descended many feet from its pristine and dignified altitude, but had even wandered to another side of the apartment, where, being placed in an advantageous position, it now presented to them their own figures, at full length, together with so much space around them, as greatly to magnify the apparent size of the room. The pictures were cleansed, and changed to better lights; the floor entirely covered by various ingenious additions made to the former scanty carpet, and, what seemed the most marvellous change of all, the old-fashioned chairs, tables, and sofas, had all, as by mutual consent, made such advances towards better acquaintance, that they had unanimously stepped from the wall, and approached in groups towards the middle of the floor. Some of them certainly did appear somewhat ashamed of thus displaying

backs, the scratches or rents in which had so long been amicably concealed by the said friendly wall; and all of them preserved such a degree of stiffness and formality in their attitudes, as might well become such venerable members of the "vieille cour:" but still the circumstance alone of their thus meeting in congregated masses bestowed an air of life and society to the room, which contrasted so favourably with its former cold and almost empty appearance, as to call forth the sincere approbation of the Miss Starinvilles, whose opinion was now required. Madame de Rouvier, pleased with their willing applause, proceeded to point out many other changes in the draperies and decorations, which produced equally advantageous effects; and finished, at length, by showing them that she had already had many of their former books, music, &c. brought down from the library. They thanked her for this attention, and, when breakfast was over, endeavoured to resume some of their almost forgotten works, when Madame de Rouvier left

the room; nor was their solitude interrupted for several hours, except by the occasional entrance of Jaqueline, who came on various errands for her mistress, and whose countenance, though she did not address them, seemed to express a satisfaction at their return, which drew from Agatha (as she quitted the room after one of these transitory visits) the remark, "That woman, notwithstanding her sullen temper, and the pride, of which the servants complain so bitterly, must have some finer qualities. Her countenance often surprises me with its expression, and just now it seems to beam with pleasure in seeing us again."

"She certainly appears well-pleased at present," replied Clarina; "but, for aught we know, she may come from Claverham's room, and her satisfaction may be owing to the secure footing he certainly seems to have established for himself here."

Agatha, struck with this remark, was about to reply, when she was interrupted by the appearance of Geoffry, who, with an air and mien

of mysterious importance, such as is usually worn by those who have fulfilled some difficult and dignified charge, informed them that, after keeping a vigilant look-out towards the avenue all the morning, he had at last seen Mr. Trefarley approaching on horseback from the farther end of it.

"I watched him sharply every yard of the way," continued the wary steward, still holding the half-opened door in his hand; "and, indeed, I walked on to meet him, for fear that sly serpent should be beforehand with me; and so I never once lost sight of him (for I called so loud to Joe to come and take his horse, that I made him hear me, though he was at the very back of the house); and then I showed him myself up the steps and into the hall;—and here he is, my dear young ladies!" concluded Mr. Drywinkle, throwing the door wide open, with pride and pleasure in his look, as he approached the climax of his intelligence.

The figure of Trefarley in deep mourning, pale, much agitated, and apparently scarcely

able to avail himself of the opportunity of advancing thus afforded him, formed but a saddening contrast to the bustle and joy of his announcement. But Agatha and Clarina, stepping instantly forward as they beheld him, held out their hands,—a movement which appeared to rouse him from his momentary trance. He therefore advanced and took their hands alternately in silence; while Mr. Drywinkle, infinitely satisfied with his own share in the performance, retired, and closed the door.

CHAPTER V.

THE Miss Starinvilles now seated themselves, and Trefarley did the same; yet, though their inquiring eyes and pale cheeks showed both their anxiety to receive information, and their inability to demand it, he still remained silent, his cheek as pallid as theirs, and his eyes bent on the ground.

At length Clarina murmured an inquiry if he were well? and making a strong effort to rouse himself, he now informed them that he had just returned from paying the last sad duties to their beloved and departed friend; and entered into various mournful details on that subject, which soon absorbed them too deeply in their own feelings to admit of their making any observation on his; while to the questions

which both occasionally mingled with their tears, he replied with increasing ease. Accordingly, when the melancholy particulars of Miss De Cruce's funeral had been discussed, all parties appeared relieved, and their conversation gradually, and almost imperceptibly, turned upon their present situation. A deep flush of colour spread over Trefarley's brow, as Agatha explained to him, with some animation, the strange circumstance of his dismissal the preceding day, and expressed the sorrow and disappointment it had occasioned both to herself and Clarina. There was, perhaps, some melancholy incredulity in his countenance at this recital, for Agatha in conclusion added, "This strange affair may well seem to you as impossible as absurd; but I can give you no other explanation of it, for we have received none ourselves."

Trefarley's reply was indistinct. It appeared, however, that he had been both surprised and shocked at so abrupt a refusal of the interview he sought. His astonishment at finding that

his disappointment had been caused by Jaqueline's interference, and his conviction that her conduct had not been the result of mistake, as pretended, were expressed more clearly; though he again hesitated, as he concluded, that as it was impossible she could have any reason of her own for such a proceeding, she must have acted in it at the command of her mistress. "But what motive should induce Madame de Rouvier to prevent us from seeing you?" inquired Agatha, with a simple eagerness which, but a few days before, would have been answered with equal candour by the person to whom it was addressed. But poor Trefarley, in the sudden discovery of feelings so long unsuspected by himself, had also sustained the shock of a tormenting dread lest others should have had earlier and better penetration; and a vague but painful terror of this kind was now mingled with the natural difficulty of replying to a question in itself so puzzling. The confusion and embarrassment of his answer, however, was soon lost in the increasing interest and anxiety with

which he listened to the details the Miss Starinvilles gave him of the transactions that had taken place since their return to Warrington.

They related to him faithfully the account they had received from Mrs. Rustleton of the intimate intercourse maintained with Claverham by Madame de Rouvier and Jaqueline; the strange proposal made to them that very morning of admitting him to their society, though Madame de Rouvier had before represented him as so extremely weak as to be unable to bear removal, a measure she certainly intended to retard. They described also the circumstances of their alarm the preceding night; and, in short, imparted to him, with the full confidence of youthful friendship towards one to whom they had so long looked up with respect and regard, all their opinions, their suspicions, and their fears.

Trefarley, engrossed more and more deeply in the narration he heard, forgot all his embarrassment, and with eager interest made numerous and particular inquiries concerning each

topic they had mentioned. He partook warmly in their alarm at Phœbe's mysterious encounter, and seemed inclined to believe the truth of her tale, except as to her suspicions of the gipsies. He had not heard, he said, of the arrival of any such people in the neighbourhood, though such events were certainly not uncommon; and the half-superstitious awe with which credulous girls in her station were wont to regard these subtle vagrants, was quite sufficient to account for the notion she had so suddenly adopted, and to which she had afterwards clung with all the pertinacity of terror. "Her first assertion having been that it was Jaqueline who had assaulted her," he continued, "showed that her fancy, rather than her sight, must have assisted in her second conclusion. How far, indeed, this waiting-maid may resemble a gipsy, I certainly cannot judge; since, long as she and her mistress have been settled here, I have never beheld her but once, and that at a distance in the park, too great to allow of any minute observation. But neither the blow itself, nor

the flight you so plainly heard after it, can, for any conceivable reason, be attributed to her; and I have no doubt, but that the reprimand she received, and the apology she made, were but a feint between her and her mistress, to conceal the real truth." Trefarley paused a moment, and then in a low tone and very slowly, said, "Could it have been Claverham himself, who was lurking in that passage, and struck down the servant only to escape observation?"

Both the Miss Starinvilles started; but Agatha quickly replied, "Surely Leonard's strength can never be so recovered as to allow him to have used such an exertion, and for what purpose?" Both Clarina and Trefarley agreed in the improbability of the suspicion thus hazarded, and all farther conjectures seemed baffled.

Agatha now related the efforts they had made to induce Madame de Rouvier to hasten Claverham's removal; and though Trefarley agreed with them in the opinion that she would,

notwithstanding every persuasion, delay this departure as long as possible, he listened with evident satisfaction to the detail. He now strongly recommended them to give orders that the surgeon should be conducted to the drawing-room, the next time he arrived, in order that they might (without giving that gentleman suspicion of their motive) learn from him the real state of his patient. Meantime, he advised them to persist steadily in their refusal to receive Leonard to their society; and he inforced on them the necessity not only of prudence, but of strict caution in their movements, with an almost trembling earnestness of voice and manner, which betrayed fears even for their personal safety, which he was unwilling openly to express.

"On any emergency, if such should arise," he concluded, "you must send instantly for me, and I will obey the call with a speed which shall not leave you long in suspense."

This naturally introduced the topic of his own future plans and intentions, and they found

that he meant to sleep at Esterfield for the last time that night. The next morning he intended, he said, to return to his father's house, which was in the small town of ———, a mile nearer to Warrington (though in an opposite direction) than he had been at Esterfield. He proposed to remain there, on account of his parents, who were in declining health, and also for the sake of his own interests, till the rectory of the adjoining parish, which, as they knew, had been promised to him on the death of its present incumbent (an old and infirm man,) should become vacant.

"Will you call me intrusive," he now inquired, as he rose to depart, "if I allow few days to pass without making my appearance here, to satisfy myself that you have no farther alarms? I promised Mr. De Cruce, even before the sad bereavement you have now sustained, to watch solicitously over your welfare and peace, and to ascertain almost daily whether you needed any assistance which might be

in my power to afford. Will you then permit me to execute that promise?"

Trefarley said this with a hesitation and embarrassment which appeared both to surprise and to wound the Miss Starinvilles' feelings, for they at once exclaimed, in a half reproachful tone, "Is it possible you can doubt that we shall always be glad to see you?"—"And are grateful for your friendly care?" added Agatha warmly; "you are, indeed, the only person now left in whom we can confide, and we may well greatly prize, as truly we need, your counsel!"

Trefarley, gratified by these expressions of esteem and confidence, now took his leave, and the Miss Starinvilles, soothed and supported by his visit, discussed afresh and more coolly, after his departure, the various topics which engrossed them. They dwelt for a while with fond minuteness on every particular he had told them regarding their deceased friend, yet, though the tears again flowed down

their cheeks, there was less of desolation in their sorrow.

Their present situation, indeed, they could not but bitterly feel was embarrassing if not dangerous; but assured of constant communication with Trefarley, they felt relieved from much of their fear, and discoursed with composure on the opinions he had expressed. Both sisters concurred (though Clarina had at first been inclined to credit the suggestion,) that Claverham could have had no motive for lurking secretly in the passage the preceding evening, strong enough to induce him to adopt conduct so disgraceful, even had he been able, maimed as he was, to exert such violent action.

The farther they succeeded, however, in persuading themselves and each other, that it could not have been Leonard who was there, the more forcibly did the question recur, "Who then was capable of an action at once so violent and so degrading? Were there any strangers in the house?"

The suspicion seemed as absurd as horrible,

and the Miss Starinvilles strove to banish it by the belief that, notwithstanding all Phœbe's assertions, her overthrow must have been occasioned by some strange and hasty ebullition of Jaqueline's haughty temper, provoked, perhaps, as Mrs. Rustleton had suggested, by the almost equally ambiguous transaction in the morning.

They had but just come to this conclusion, when the sudden appearance of that singular person's face looking eagerly in at the door, which she had gently opened only far enough to admit her head, so startled them, that both involuntarily rose from their chairs. Her black eyes roved round the room as if to ascertain that no one else was there, then fixing on the Miss Starinvilles a gaze of very peculiar expression, a smile of satisfaction, triumph, scorn—it was impossible to say which, for one instant curled her beautiful mouth, and the next moment the door was shut, and she was gone. Agatha and Clarina remained standing, and so greatly surprised at this apparition, that neither of them for some moments moved or spoke.

They had but just looked towards each other, when a step near the door again attracted their attention that way, and with curiosity somewhat akin to dread, they once more beheld it open. But Madame de Rouvier alone appeared, and relieved by her presence, though still conscious of an agitation of which, however, they began to be ashamed, they re-seated themselves; while Madame de Rouvier, almost immediately taking up a book, offered to read aloud to them, as if desirous to escape from the exertion of discourse.

Agatha, however, was too anxious both to inquire the cause of Jaqueline's intrusive visit, and to forbid its repetition, to remain silent, and she therefore rather abruptly asked, "Did you send Jaqueline here just now to examine the room, or was she prompted only by her own curiosity? If it were the latter, I must beg, Madame de Rouvier, you will apprize her, that it is very unpleasant to my sister and me to be so strangely watched."

"I did not send her," cried Madame de

Rouvier, "and really I do not know why she dislikes Mr. Trefarley; but she would not believe me when I told her he was gone, and—" Madame de Rouvier did not take her eyes from the fire as she said this, and did not, therefore perceive the looks of surprise and displeasure, which were interchanged between the sisters, at an explanation which betrayed such strange presumption in Mademoiselle Jaqueline.

"You cannot surely suppose, Madame de Rouvier," cried Agatha, suddenly interrupting her, "we are at all solicitous to learn Jaqueline's opinion of Mr. Trefarley! We must only beg, that she will not, in future, indulge her curiosity regarding either ourselves or our friends by such unceremonious means!"

Madame de Rouvier's cheek turned pale, as with a subdued voice she replied, "I shall certainly let Jaqueline know how much you dislike her presence. I dare say, she will be as little inclined as I should, in her case, to impose it on you."

As she concluded this sentence, she again took up the book she had laid aside, but she no longer made any offer of reading it aloud, but soon was, or appeared to be, so deeply engrossed in its pages, that it was evident she did not wish for farther discourse.

Nor were the Miss Starinvilles more disposed for conversation than herself. They accordingly remained together in silence till the dinner-bell summoned them to their respective apartments to dress. When they again met at dinner, her ill humour (if such it had been) was gone, and she was courteous and obliging as usual. She made no mention of Claverham, and having slightly asked after Mr. Trefarley's health, and whether the funeral had taken place that day, said little more, till, on their return to the drawing-room, she proposed to resume the book she had offered to read aloud, and commencing it immediately, continued her occupation till she was evidently fatigued. She then rose, and wishing them good night, though it was still early, asked if they

would also like to retire to their room, in which case she would accompany them up the stairs. Fatigued with the scene of the preceding night, and with listening to reading in which they could take no interest, they willingly assented to this proposal, and accordingly proceeded, accompanied by her, to their own apartment, at the door of which she again bade them good-night, and departed towards her room.

When Mrs. Rustleton made her appearance, with her usual sedate composure, she made some inquiries concerning the intelligence Mr. Trefarley had brought. She, on her own part, had little news to communicate.

She had neither seen nor heard any thing of Mr. Claverham, for Mr. Drywinkle, who, she said, hated Mademoiselle Jaqueline and her mistress worse every hour, had now declared that he would not again go near an apartment where (shameless creatures as they were) one or other of them, if not both, were always to be found. Mademoiselle Jaqueline, indeed, had been out, on one of her long tramping walks, but her mistress had then stayed

with Mr. Claverham; and had only left him to go into the shrubbery, and meet her on her return, "Which, I think," concluded Mrs. Rustleton, "was soon after Mr. Trefarley's departure; and then, I believe, Madame Rover went to sit with you, while t'other hurried off to Mr. Claverham, as usual."

Agatha could not now resist asking the housekeeper, "Did you ever hear Jaqueline say any thing about Mr. Trefarley?"

"Dear me, no, Miss Starinville!" replied Mrs. Rustleton. "Indeed, I seldom ever hear her say any thing at all; and when I do, it's ten to one if I understand it! But what should she have to say about him? I don't much think she ever saw him."

Agatha was half sorry for her own question, and answered slightly, "Oh, I thought, from the message she sent him by Phœbe, that she might, perhaps, have some prejudice or ill-will against him."

"I believe, Miss Starinville," replied Mrs. Rustleton, with slow gravity, "that she hearti-

ly hates us all, as I'm sure we do her. But Phœbe is a very foolish girl, and so I have told her repeatedly, to no manner of purpose. I have never believed either of her tales since she would have it that the gipsies were got into the house; and Mr. Drywinkle is just of my opinion. As for the message to Mr. Trefarley, I can't think, not I, how I ever gave credit to it at all; for how should she be able to understand Mademoiselle Jaqueline better than Mr. Drywinkle, or I do; and certainly we can never make out more than a word or so at a time. No doubt, she wanted something else, and was angry enough with Phœbe for running off to Mr. Trefarley; and so, I dare say, she gave her that spiteful push when she met her last night, with a hearty good-will!"

There was, on this occasion, sufficient reason and good sense in Mrs. Rustleton's pertinacity to have weight with the Miss Starinvilles. It is true, that Madame de Rouvier's ambiguous answers, and Jaqueline's own strange conduct, furnished them with causes for suspicion which

she had not; yet her composed and seemingly rational method of accounting for two occurrences which had so greatly perplexed them, made them now half smile at their own doubts and fears on the subject. With minds thus tranquillized, they soon after dismissed her; and, retiring to rest, enjoyed slumber more profound and undisturbed than they had for some time known.

CHAPTER VI.

SEVERAL days now passed, if not in the comfort of security, at least unbroken by any occurrence which might rouse alarms thus subsided. Madame de Rouvier, indeed, rarely joined the Miss Starinvilles but at their meals, and for a few hours in the evening; always proposing to retire very early. She never spoke of Claverham, except in reply to their daily questions concerning him; when she continued to represent him as in a very precarious state, and generally contrived to add some hint respecting his joining them, which induced them willingly to change the discourse. Meantime, it appeared that the surgeon had altogether discontinued his visits, though she professed each

day to expect him, and expressed surprise that he had not come.

The arrival of letters from Rybrent, off Plymouth, caused for a while a strong accession to the Miss Starinvilles' grief: yet the sight of his hand-writing; the warm affection he expressed towards them; his sanguine hope of being able to return to England by the end of the following year; and the cheering light in which, for their sakes, he endeavoured, in the meantime, to view their secluded, but he trusted safe, situation; all ultimately concurred to soothe their spirits. Even though unconscious of the fatal termination of Miss De Cruce's illness, it was evident that he was prepared for the worst, having indeed left her with anticipations more gloomy than he had imparted to them. Still, with the hopeful buoyancy of his age, he clung to the ray of comfort their last letter had conveyed; and when Trefarley owned to them that he had purposely avoided a communication, which it was in his power to have made, they thanked the friendly prudence which had

thus averted from Rybrent the knowledge of an event which would have hung like a cloud upon his mind during the whole of a long voyage, under its own circumstances, sufficiently harassing to his spirits.

Nearly three weeks thus glided slowly on, the Miss Starinvilles (but especially Clarina) occupying much of the time in the minute and circumstantial journal which they had promised to commence, and faithfully to continue, for Rybrent.

They saw Trefarley almost daily, and though his visits became shorter, and his silence and embarrassment appeared to increase, yet they were conscious of protection in his presence, and looked to his advice as a valuable resource.

Mademoiselle Jaqueline they now scarcely ever beheld, and only heard occasionally from Mrs. Rustleton, that she was often absent from the house half the day. "I believe her mistress sends her tramping about in that way," observed the perplexed housekeeper one night, "though what she goes after, no earthly body

can guess. But she is always closetted with Madam Rover before she sets out, and when she comes back, they generally meet, Mr. Drywinkle says, in the shrubbery, and there they are, pacing up and down for hours, and talking in their foolish fast way. I 'm sure, I can 't imagine how they ever understand one another! Phœbe says she goes after the gipsies; but Mr. Drywinkle and I do not know what to think about that. He says, indeed, those wicked wretches are there still, sure enough, but they don't venture to come about this house, and Mademoiselle Jaqueline always goes out too quite the opposite way."

Agatha here could not refrain from exclaiming, "It is a pity Geoffry never follows to see where she goes!"

"Bless you, Miss Starinville!" replied Mrs. Rustleton, "he says it is no manner of use! You may as well try to track a ghost. In the first place, she goes sliding away at such a rate, that it puts him quite out of breath to follow her; and then, if he does manage to keep

up with her, she takes advantage of the first solitary place they come to, to stand stock still all of sudden, and turn round upon him, with her eyes wide open, with such a stare, as, Mr. Drywinkle says, would startle any human creature; and then he feels it awkward a little, he says, to turn back, and yet he does not much like to go on, for, after all, he knows he has no particular right to follow her; and so he declares he 'll have nothing more to do with it. As for poor Joe, he is an active lad enough, and could easily keep up with her, but we might as well send him to catch a lion by the tail! She did but gabble half-a-dozen of her nonsensical French words to him the other day, (to be sure, she was angry, and so, I dare say, they were bad words enough, if he had understood them,) and he has thought himself bewitched ever since. His very teeth chattered in his head yesterday, only because I happened to ask him what could make him look so pale! The poor boy verily believes he is going to die!"

There was enough in this to provoke the smile, which Agatha truly could not suppress; yet there was also something so unpleasant in the renewed supposition of any intercourse with these gipsies, as to induce the Miss Starinvilles to relate the substance of this report to Mr. Trefarley the morning after they had heard it. He laid but little stress on the rumour himself, but promised them that he would ride to the encampment of those wanderers, as he returned home, and observe if there were really any suspicious circumstances to be seen there. "I do not know precisely where it lies," he continued, "but I think you said before, that it is just without the park, on the side opposite to Esterfield. If so, I must pass not far from it, I presume, whenever I come here, and it will therefore be very easy for me to reconnoitre it without any great loss of time."

It was now agreed between them, that he should also call on the surgeon, whose opinion of Leonard it was evident they were not likely to obtain by any other means; while

they naturally became every day more uneasy at his protracted stay in the house, as well as at the evident indecorum of Madame de Rouvier's conduct towards him.

It was therefore settled that Trefarley should make this visit to the surgeon on the morrow before he saw them; but as the town of —— was seven miles distant from Warrington, in a direction nearly opposite to that where Trefarley resided, he informed them that they must expect him later in the day than usual. They now mentioned (what they had before considered almost too trivial,) Madame de Rouvier's strange assertion concerning Jaqueline's dislike to him, and Agatha, with a smile, asked him if he could conjecture any reason for it?

"None whatever," answered Trefarley; "except the general effect of my unprepossessing appearance."

The air of gravity, and the blush which accompanied these words, were, perhaps, called forth by the sudden and painful remembrance of the effect his physiognomy had, in early

times, been wont to produce on Agatha herself. But checking himself, he added more gaily, "Mademoiselle Jaqueline, however, must possess quicker eyes than mine, or have had opportunities of observing me, of which I am not aware, if my aspect has displeased her; for I have seen her, as I told you, but once, and that too far from me to distinguish any of her features." He became more earnest as he added, "That he could not but consider her as a dark and dangerous woman, and he greatly applauded Agatha for an exertion of spirit which had at least freed them from her prying and impertinent intrusions."

"Yet," cried Agatha, "I am not sure that you would retain your prejudices against her if you saw her; for she has at times the most beautiful and animated expression in her countenance I ever beheld; and really the changes in it are often so rapid and striking, that when once my gaze is fixed on her face, I feel it rooted there as if with the fascinating power of the rattlesnake."

Agatha spoke with the eagerness of enthusiasm, but Clarina, at her last words, laughingly expressed her satisfaction that her sister had herself found out at last the very resemblance she had so often ridiculed when discovered by others; while Trefarley, surprised at Agatha's description of Jaqueline, but pleased to see them both resuming some of the natural gaiety of their age, now took his leave, and the remainder of their morning passed in solitude. This solitude indeed appeared little likely to be disturbed, for of all the families who had visited heretofore at Warrington, not one now came within its gates. Strange and humiliating reports had indeed gone abroad concerning the transactions carried on there, which, had they reached the Miss Starinvilles' ears, would have deeply wounded their feelings. But they received no such addition to their sensations, already sufficiently bitter, of desolation and sorrow; though they had begun occasionally to wonder that none of their former acquaintances visited them in their affliction.

It is true, that calumny herself had not ventured to cast a stain, however slight, upon their names; on the contrary, they were pitied on all sides, as young and unprotected girls in the power of a woman so totally unworthy as Madame de Rouvier was now universally pronounced to be.

But the spirit of such compassion is but too apt to evaporate in the articulation of the sentences which express it. The Miss Starinvilles were friendless, and with so profligate a father, might very probably become portionless girls. Rybrent de Cruce, who had been of late rising into importance, had suddenly, as it were, vanished.

Esterfield Lodge, which, if as dull as Lady Rockstar averred, was, at least, a respectable mansion, by Miss de Cruce's death became shut up.

Leonard Claverham, if not dangerously wounded, which was, in fact, so little credited by the neighbourhood, that, notwithstanding the surgeon had, on the open field, and in the pre-

sence of many witnesses, set his broken arm, and dressed a deep wound in his head, many gravely persisted in affirming that his accident was merely a pretence to establish himself in Warrington ; was now actually immured there with his Calypso, whose fascinations had evidently enchained him too strongly, they said, to allow of his escape.

What object then remained to draw any one to Warrington, to risk the contamination of Madame de Rouvier's more than doubtful proceedings, or to partake, by thus patronising her, in the odium they very generally excited ? Mrs. Perkins's curiosity had long since been sated ; and the sentiments of most of the rest were, with little variation, to be shortly, but comprehensively, summed up, in the answer which Mrs. Marchdale, in her most decided tone, pronounced to her daughters' request, that they might call upon the Miss Starinvilles soon after Miss de Cruce's funeral had taken place. " No, my dears ; I 'm sure, I 'm very sorry for the Miss Starinvilles, poor things ! but I hear there are

strange doings going on at Warrington, and I see no use in your visiting there at all!" Even Trefarley's daily rides there were quickly regarded with a suspicious eye by a neighbourhood now on the alert to discover evil in a mansion, where, but a short time before, nothing but gaiety and grace seemed to reside. Opinions were, however, on this topic much divided. Some affirmed that Trefarley was in love with Agatha, and that Miss de Cruce had both seen and sanctioned this ill-assorted attachment; others declared that it was Clarina he preferred, and that he was taking advantage of Rybrent's absence to supplant him; while more insisted that he owned the all-potent sway of Madame de Rouvier's attractions; and some even went so far as to augur, that as soon as Claverham should recover, there would be a jealous explosion, perhaps a duel, between the unequal rivals. Of all these reports, meanwhile, Trefarley, dividing his time solely between his infirm parents and the Miss Starinvilles, happily for his peace, heard nothing: and on leaving

Warrington, after the above conversation, he proceeded for some time, considering only the best means of making such inquiries of the surgeon as might supply the Miss Starinvilles with the intelligence they wanted, without implicating either their names or his own, in a curiosity suspicious enough to wear any strange appearance in the mind of that gentleman. These thoughts engrossed him, as with the bridle on its neck, his horse toiled slowly up the very steep ascent which led to the gate of the park nearest his home. This road was for some considerable distance shaded by a thick forest, which clothed the side of the hill, climbing more than half way up an eminence which, besides being thus adorned, was broken into every variety of form.

Above midway, the road suddenly emerged from this rich fringe of wood, and rose in a direct line towards the summit of the hill, through the short heath and furze which covered its top. This spread on the right into a common of some extent, but on the left, was

bounded by an abrupt and almost perpendicular descent into the woody hills and dark ravines, which at once ornamented, and rendered well nigh inaccessible, the western quarter of the park.

About a hundred yards after leaving the wood, appeared the plain and massive gate, which closed the entrance into this part of the demesnes. Hence a superb view offered itself of the stately mansion below, seated, as it seemed, under the shelter of this wooded hill, the ground before it stretching away on both sides in spacious grandeur. The venerable avenue marked, in one direction, the principal approach to the house; while another road was seen winding, in the opposite way, over open glades, and between extensive woods, which ultimately concealed its junction with the public road towards ——, some miles farther to the west. Trefarley having opened the gate he had now reached, stopped his horse a few minutes to gaze on a scene still so lovely, though possessing not a remnant of the rich garb which summer

had thrown over it. In some spots, indeed, which even December had not yet totally stripped, the declining sun streamed with a seemingly partial radiance, as if it would fain linger on the last and withered remains of the foliage, on which it had shone so warmly but a few months since; and brightly did these favoured nooks reflect the rays in scarlet and orange hues, that flickered gaily among the brown woods above and around them. After viewing for some time this prospect, on one side of which a level line of sea appeared to offer its tranquil bed to the sinking sun, Trefarley turned to pursue his road, which led up the remainder of the hill, and across the common. But he now suddenly recollected his promise of visiting the gipsies, of whose vicinity the Miss Starinvilles had apprised him, and concerning whom the reports they had heard had inspired them with vague sentiments of curiosity and distrust.

These wanderers, Trefarley thought, had, no doubt, pitched their tents on the common to the right, and therefore keeping by the park-

paling he made his way in that direction as quickly as his horse could proceed over the rough and broken ground; and though it became wilder and less passable as he advanced, he patiently plodded on, till the palings, turning suddenly downwards, were finally lost to his sight among cultivated fields below, little likely to be the resort of the people he sought.

So far as he could see across the common, neither tent nor hut could be distinguished, and he was therefore convinced that the gipsies in question (if not a creation altogether of Mrs. Rustleton's disordered brain) must have their abode in the opposite direction of the palings. He found, on retracing his steps, that in the excitement of pursuit, he had gone farther than he imagined, and by the time he regained the road, the rays of the sun were streaming through a gathering mist, which seemed ready to close a day of unusual beauty for the season. However, he resolved to continue his search, and crossing the road, kept, as before, the park-pa-

lings for his guide: but his course was now quickly checked by the precipitous declivity which the eminence on this side offered, and which rendered descent on foot extremely difficult, and on horseback utterly impracticable. It was in vain that he coasted along the edge of the hill in hopes of discovering some track, however rugged. The ground below him was so steep as scarcely to hold the loose stones which, here and there, rested on it; while farther down it was broken into yawning gulleys, or deep ravines, whose bottom was effectually concealed by the trees with which they were filled. All downward advance on horseback was therefore manifestly impossible; and as the brink of the hill led away from the park boundary, the course of which was indeed no longer visible, Trefarley again turned his horse. His unsuccessful search had now roused his spirit, and jumping to the ground as he again reached the palings, he fastened the animal to them, and by the aid of some brushwood, half swung and half leaped down a perilous chasm, and quickly

lighting on his feet, he pushed his downward way with much agility and speed. But each step he took, and every plunge he made into the tangled pits and dark dells before him, only involved him in increasing gloom. The thickening mist gathered more and more densely round him; and at length, all hope of succeeding in his pursuit that evening having vanished, he again climbed, not without considerable difficulty and danger, the broken precipice he had descended. Mounting his horse, he proceeded homewards, resolving to pursue his now fruitless search some following day, and to penetrate on foot, from the lower grounds of the park, the ravines which were so difficult of access from above.

CHAPTER VII.

When Mrs. Rustleton attended her young ladies that night, (which she did at a later hour than usual,) they found both her fear and wrath greatly excited by the intelligence she had just learned from Mr. Drywinkle. This was no less than the discovery that Mr. Claverham, notwithstanding the precarious state in which he affected to be, was, in fact, sufficiently recovered to venture out at night, attended only by Jaqueline; whose name, on this occasion, Mrs. Rustleton pronounced with marks of disgust and detestation, in which the Miss Starinvilles could not but share. The abandoned woman, she said, Mr. Drywinkle had himself seen, but half an hour ago, stealing homewards with a man, who, though greatly muffled up,

he was confident was no other than Mr. Claverham himself, and with whom she stood for some moments watching the upper windows attentively, as if waiting for some signal. "And Madam Rover was ready enough to give it to them," averred Mrs. Rustleton; "for Mr. Drywinkle saw her come almost immediately to the window of her bed-room, and hold up a candle there." The two figures then swiftly crossing the parterre, entered the drawing-room through the glass-door, and Mr. Drywinkle lost sight of them.

The Steward had, it seemed, for some days observed, that Stephen, Mr. Claverham's servant, was occasionally busied in cleaning boots which looked as if newly soiled; and this circumstance having awakened the wily Geoffry's suspicions, he had secretly resolved on keeping watch round the house this evening; that being the hour which, for various reasons, he imagined Mr. Claverham selected for his excursions. Accordingly, he had watched two hours in vain; till at length, tired of his fruitless la-

bour, and chilled by the increasing mist, he was retreating towards the house, and was just about to cross the parterre, in order to reach a small back-entrance, when he suddenly heard a rustling noise, and perceived the two figures above-mentioned advance to the extremity of a covered walk, and there pause. Geoffry had thus time and opportunity to observe them; and had he seen Claverham alone, it is probable that the testy, and in general fearless, steward would have advanced, and, boldly challenging him by name, would thus have apprised him that his nocturnal prowlings were discovered. But though Geoffry listened in silence to the housekeeper's frequent and scornful reflections on poor Joe's folly, in believing himself bewitched by Mademoiselle Jaqueline's hard words and evil glances, and never interposed for his defence, when, as was sometimes the case, she even openly reprimanded him on the subject; the truth was, that he entertained himself, in secret, an opinion extremely similar. It is very certain that,

on the present occasion, her presence alone, at once in his eyes disgusting and formidable, protected Mr. Claverham, and perhaps himself, from an encounter which might have proved any thing but peaceable.

The Miss Starinvilles listened to these details with almost equal alarm and disgust. Both instantly recollected the custom Madame de Rouvier had of late adopted, not only of proposing to retire from the drawing-room at an earlier hour than usual, but also of accompanying them to their apartment, as if to ascertain that they were safe there, before proceeding to her own; whence, they now presumed, she gave immediate signal that the coast was clear below. So cold a chill of horror accompanied these thoughts, as they flashed across her mind, that Agatha hastened to relieve herself from the sensation, by cherishing every doubt she could muster that Geoffry might have been deceived in such a misty night; for why did he not ascertain at once, by going to his chamber, whether Mr. Claverham were there, rather than adopt

the tedious process of watching out of doors till it was so dark that he might easily have mistaken the trees or shrubs for human figures.

Mrs. Rustleton, however, overturned these flimsy objections with more haste and animation than she was wont to betray. Mr. Drywinkle had, for several evenings, attempted to visit Mr. Claverham's room, under pretence of inquiring for his health, but he always found the door locked; and when Stephen came to it, with a specious smile, he constantly told him, that his master was very poorly, and was gone to sleep. "As for the difficulty of knowing people from shrubs, it was not so great, when one saw them walk across a parterre and open a glass-door!"—Mrs. Rustleton concluded; and Agatha found no ready answer to the remark.

But she now turned to Clarina, and observed that she would speak openly to Madame de Rouvier the next morning, and informing her of what they knew, insist upon Mr. Claverham's instant removal from the house. To this Clarina willingly assented; but the housekeeper

interposed. Mr. Drywinkle had conjured her, it appeared, (though, in her wrath, she had forgotten the precaution,) not to impart his story to the Miss Starinvilles, without exacting from them first a promise to conceal it at least for the present.

"He had no proof of what he had seen," he said, "but his own assertion; which Mr. Claverham and Mademoiselle Jaqueline would no doubt scoff at and contradict." He was now, however, aware of their practices, and would watch the following night, and be better prepared to detect them publicly. Perhaps Mr. Trefarley would consent to accompany and assist him: not, Geoffry had added, that either of them was at all afraid, but it was always best to have an additional witness. At all events, he wished to consult Mr. Trefarley before they should be put upon their guard. To these reasonings the Miss Starinvilles, who were aware they should see Trefarley the next morning, at length conceded; on condition, however, that they should them-

selves inform him of the matter, and consult his opinion as to the steps to be pursued.

Mrs. Rustleton took on herself to affirm, that Mr. Drywinkle would cheerfully yield to this, and on this compromise they parted. The Miss Starinvilles then fastened their door, examining every aperture in their chamber, with an alarm which intelligence so unpleasant might naturally excite, but which not the slightest disturbance through the night occurred to justify.

When they met Madame de Rouvier the next morning at breakfast, she appeared to observe the cold and distant manner they could not refrain from assuming towards her. She made no remark on it, however, but before she left them, (as she was now wont to do every day immediately after breakfast,) she introduced of her own accord the subject of Claverham.

"He was certainly getting better," she said, "though still very weak." Agatha's eye flashed with indignation, but checking herself, she replied only, that as she and her sister were

convinced he must by this time be well enough to bear even more fatigue than could be incurred by a removal to his own house, they intended speedily to insist on his leaving Warrington; "And, indeed," Agatha rather imprudently added, "we were only waiting to see Mr. Trefarley, before we propose that this change should be made to-morrow at the latest."

A look of eager scrutiny had brightened Madame de Rouvier's soft brown eye into sharp severity during the first of these sentences, but as Agatha mentioned Trefarley's name, a smile of scorn stole over her face, and altered, at least, if it did not mitigate, the keenness of her glance. "Mr. Trefarley is a happy man, and a deserving person, no doubt, to possess so large a share of your confidence," she at last said, in a slow and guarded tone; "but I believe, on the present occasion, it would be more to your purpose to see Mr. Claverham himself. He affirms, I assure you, very positively, that he will not leave your house till he has thanked you personally for the hospi-

tality" (she laid a very ambiguous stress on this word) "which you have shown him: and when I tell him, that you are not, I think, inclined for such a meeting, he perplexes me greatly by asking me, if I imagine that he is to leave the house like a culprit who had entered it by stealth, rather than as a friend who was received there in distress?" She here paused; but neither of the Miss Starinvilles replied.

Agatha, sorry for having gone farther than she intended, was silent from a feeling of embarrassment; while Clarina prudently determined to avoid any discussion on the business, till they had seen and consulted with Trefarley, as they intended. Madame de Rouvier herself seemed not sorry that the answer she thus appeared to await was not given, and shortly afterwards quitted the room.

It was much later than usual when Trefarley arrived. He had been detained, he said, some time in waiting the return of the surgeon, who was out when he called. "And I gained but little by my inquiries at last, when I did see

him," continued Trefarley. "He answered, indeed, all my questions with frank cordiality, and seemed well disposed to give me every information in his power, without expressing, or appearing to feel, any surprise or suspicion at my curiosity; but I soon found he knew scarcely more than we do ourselves. He told me fairly, indeed, that Mr. Claverham's arm seemed likely to do very well when last he saw him; but he added, that the wound in his head, when he then dressed it, was in such a state, and there was still so much fever in his frame, that he could not by any means undertake to guess what state he might now be in. He then said, very candidly, that nothing but Mr. Claverham's own desire, openly expressed, that he would discontinue his visits, could have induced him to withdraw his attendance from a patient in such a situation; but that, of course, he had submitted to his injunctions."

Trefarley concluded by adding, that this gentleman, having thus answered his inquiries, made none in return; but, like a shrewd man,

who seemed aware there were intricacies in the business, with which he had neither a wish nor a right to meddle, concerned himself no farther than to give honestly the information required of him.

Agatha now related the very unpleasant particulars which they had learned the preceding evening, and added the conversation just held with Madame de Rouvier, together with the kind of message she had delivered to them from Claverham. Trefarley listened with deep attention, nor even, when she had ceased speaking, did he for some time reply. A thousand contrary thoughts, which he could scarcely arrange or express, crowded into his mind. All the recent circumstances of Claverham's conduct had tended to prove him engaged in an intimacy with Madame de Rouvier, little consonant with the attachment Trefarley had once feared he entertained for Agatha; and upon this conviction he had rested with a sensation of relief he had not cared to investigate, but which was now shaken again by the message he had

just heard. For, if Leonard, fascinated by Madame de Rouvier, had really been employing various stratagems to conceal the progress of his recovery, and had even, for that purpose, run the risk of dismissing his medical attendant, at a period still so critical, for the sake of remaining undisturbed in the same house with her; why should he be thus anxious for an interview which must render the farther continuance of such deception difficult, if not impracticable? It is true, Madame de Rouvier had, as from herself, once before proposed to admit him to join them, but Trefarley had attributed this only to her desire of reconciling the enjoyment of his company with that of her pupils; and she had since, it seemed, made her tacit election between them, by almost entirely renouncing their society for his. Was Claverham, then, himself, really solicitous to see the Miss Starinvilles; and were his private conferences with Madame de Rouvier only in furtherance of the political designs which both he and Rybrent had, on good grounds, suspected

them of harbouring, and which, in these perilous times of public excitement, were but too common? Yet to what purpose could tend these nightly walks with Jaqueline? The concealed person in the passage—the frightened servant's assertion that it was a gipsy who had struck her down—here flashed across Trefarley's mind, and a belief, almost amounting to certainty, succeeded, that some secret intercourse must, in fact, have been established with the vagrants, whose habitation he began to suspect had not been so studiously removed from all common access without some reason, and who might, perhaps, even prove to be agents from that very club in Paris, with which Madame de Rouvier had openly professed herself to be allied; while she had endeavoured, as Trefarley well knew, to establish a corresponding Jacobinical society in her present neighbourhood. That she should make use of Mademoiselle Jaqueline's services in facilitating both her own and Claverham's intercourse with these people, was readily to be imagined; and at once solved a

difficulty, which otherwise seemed almost insurmountable, in accounting for her evident permission of the familiarity established between this damsel and Claverham. Arrived at this point in the chain of ideas which had thus rapidly glided through his mind, Trefarley now suddenly broke his silence, by warmly expressing his regret that he had failed the preceding evening in his attempt to discover the retreat of these strangers, and his determination to resume the search as early as possible on the morrow, and ascertain at once both their appearance and their numbers. He then accounted for a sudden mention of them, which he saw had created some surprise in his auditors, by explaining the suspicions concerning them which had been crowding on his mind. But to the arguments, which he now hastily strung together in corroboration of this his new view of Claverham's conduct, he found the Miss Starinvilles listened with feelings as different as their characters.

Clarina, with an alarm which blanched her cheek, heard of suspicions in which her own

judgment but too exactly coincided, and which, while they opened to her a fresh field of fear in the seditious machinations and sanguinary schemes of French republicanism, renewed also very painfully the dread, which recent events had abated, lest Claverham, if really not attached to Madame de Rouvier, should solicit, perhaps eventually gain, Agatha's regard. But while she consequently listened to Trefarley's suggestions with almost breathless attention and terror, Agatha was very differently affected by what she heard. Leonard's message of that morning had almost unconsciously awakened in her some of the interest she had been wont to entertain for him. Every circumstance, therefore, adduced by Trefarley, to prove that political designs probably formed the basis of the intimacy which had been so offensive to her, and produced the stratagems she had till now attributed to other causes, did but work in her mind an effect as unexpected as it was deeply contrary to his wishes, by rather reinstating Claverham in her good graces, than

awakening the new fears and cautions he intended to enforce.

It is true, poor Trefarley himself was not fully aware of this result; though he was somewhat startled at the levity, as he deemed it, with which Agatha, after some pause, replied, "Why then really, Mr. Trefarley, if that is all, I do not see that we need trouble ourselves much about the matter! We have so little to do with politics, that if these should be French gipsies, as you think, they can have nothing whatever to say to us; while their acquaintance with Madame de Rouvier and Jaqueline can scarcely be deemed unnatural. I think, therefore, we had better see Mr. Claverham, as he proposes; for whatever his political theories may be, we have no right to interfere with them; and we can then better arrange his departure from our house, which is the only point of much real importance to us." Neither Trefarley nor Clarina replied immediately to observations which betrayed a view of the subject so uncongenial to their own; and Agatha, struck with their grave looks, conti-

nued—" I do not mean, of course, that all these plots are not very disagreeable; indeed, these secret walks, and probably nightly meetings with these people, are really exceedingly alarming and improper. I only can not help feeling that a political conspiracy, or whatever it may be called, is widely different—" But Agatha hesitated, while a rising colour in her cheek, had it been witnessed, might have made a more intelligible conclusion to her speech than she was likely to express by words. But she turned away, and while she was busily engaged in stirring the almost extinguished fire, Clarina's eyes, too full of tears to have seen her sister distinctly, had she still remained before her, turned in mute appeal to Trefarley. All his eloquence, however, seemed to have spent itself in the reasoning which had produced an effect, which, if not fully intelligible to him, he plainly saw was different from what he wished; and it was therefore with hesitating periods, and embarrassment almost amounting to awkwardness, that he replied, " Perhaps, Miss Sta-

rinville is right. Indeed, if Mr. Claverham refused to leave the house without such an interview, they might not be able to persist in denying it." As Trefarley proceeded, he struggled to shake off his confusion, and at length added more firmly his advice, that they should appear to consider Claverham's request to see them as an announcement of his departure, and should, under that view, consent to it. With regard to Geoffry's proposal of watching, and detecting his nocturnal rambles with Jaqueline, Trefarley seemed entirely averse to such a proceeding. They now knew enough, he represented, to put them on their guard, and to give them good reason absolutely to insist on Leonard's quitting the house, should they find him inclined to use any fresh stratagem to evade such a measure. Meantime, nothing could be more injudicious than uselessly to irritate either him or his vindictive associate in these mysterious walks, by a premature disclosure of any knowledge of their secret practices; while it was also extremely adviseable, if possible, to

avoid an open exposure in the neighbourhood, of proceedings so little creditable to the parties concerned, or to the mansion in which they were transacted.

Agatha, whose thoughts were greatly engrossed, both by the totally new light which Trefarley had thrown on Leonard's recent conduct, and also by the idea of so speedily seeing the latter, listened to all this with the silence of acquiescence; while Clarina, though she faintly expressed her belief, or, at least, her fear, that Claverham did not intend to depart so peacefully and so easily as Trefarley thought, yet concurred with his remaining opinions, and willingly promised to follow his advice.

CHAPTER VIII.

On leaving the Miss Starinvilles, with a promise of again seeing them the following day, when he hoped to be able to give them some description of these gipsies, whose retreat he resolved to explore at an early hour in the morning, Trefarley held some conference with Mr. Drywinkle.

He found the steward in a state of that kind of irritability in which a man may be supposed to lie awake in a dark night, tormented half to death by mosquitoes, yet unable either to see or to avenge himself on his enemies. Plots, intrigues, all manner of mischief and modes of evil, were buzzing in multitudes round his harassed brains, though for his very life he could neither discern the corner

from which they issued, nor the point of attack to which they tended. Mr. Claverham pretended he was dangerously ill, and yet prowled about at night, with a strangely unsuitable companion, and for some indefinable purpose. Madam Rover courted this same Mr. Claverham, in Geoffry's opinion, with evident and shameless effrontery; and yet consented to watch over and assist his nocturnal walks with a woman even more detestable than herself. Stephen cleaned his master's boots every morning, and all the rest of the day protested that his said master was asleep. Of Mademoiselle Jaqueline by name, indeed, Geoffry did not care to express any very decisive opinion, for reasons best known to himself; but which a sudden horror he had lately rather unguardedly shown at the sight of some pins and needles, scattered by chance on the kitchen-table, would at once have betrayed to poor Joe, his fellow-sufferer in these notions, had the latter been present to have interpreted sensations so akin to his own.

Be that as it may, however, amid all these mysterious and contradictory proceedings, poor Mr. Drywinkle stood in amazed bewilderment; and Trefarley soon found, that while he could himself gain nothing by inquiries, which elicited only the tale of the preceding evening, with little variation, it would be the height of cruelty to add to the perplexities amid which the steward was struggling, with all the force and fear of a full-grown fly in a spider's web, (and, indeed, with much the same result, inasmuch as he thereby only entangled himself more and more) by imparting any of his own newly awakened suspicions concerning the vagrant tribe, on whose account Mr. Drywinkle seemed at present to have taken no alarm.

He therefore contented himself with explaining to the steward his chief reasons for recommending no open watch to be held, either on Mr. Claverham himself, or on his depraved companions; though he anxiously impressed on Geoffry the necessity of redoubled but concealed precautions for the safety of his young

ladies. Willingly, indeed, would Trefarley himself have remained to fulfil the charge he was thus obliged to consign to another, and anxiously did he revolve in his mind the possibility of keeping guard near the house, on this, the last night, as he now hoped, that Claverham would be in it. But the impracticability of such a measure, without impropriety almost as evident as that he would fain counteract, was too glaring to be withstood; and Trefarley reluctantly pursued his homeward road, at an hour so late that the dusk of evening had commenced. Deeply engaged in the consideration of the new perils which menaced the helpless girls he had left, in the secret and dangerous connexion which now appeared to exist between the suspicious guests within their house, and the vagrant, perhaps foreign horde of lawless wanderers, without; Trefarley, as he proceeded up the wooded hill, looked carefully for the track which he knew existed, and which, diverging on the left, led downwards to the hollow ground it was so difficult to

attain from above. By this rarely trodden, but still perceptible path, he was determined next morning on foot to explore the recesses to which it led, and he now looked down it, as he reached its junction with the road, as far as the increasing darkness, and its narrow and winding nature would permit. He had stopped his horse a few moments for this purpose, and was just again about to proceed, when he fancied he saw some figures slowly ascending from below. Once more, therefore, he checked his horse, and, hid beneath the shade of some spreading trees which canopied his road, he watched the approach of these people with eager curiosity. As they drew nearer, he perceived them to be a man and a woman. The former was much muffled up in a large cloak, whose high collar, almost meeting the brims of a slouching hat, rendered his face scarcely visible. The latter was hardly to be seen, having fallen behind her companion as the path became more narrow. Trefarley now firmly believed he beheld Claverham and Ma-

demoiselle Jaqueline on their return from a visit to their new associates; and while his heart swelled with anger at their nefarious doings, he panted also with eagerness to address them, and thus at once to convince himself and carry shame to them. The reflection darted rapidly across his mind, that such a detection of them, while it would entail no exposure in the neighbourhood, would yet give him henceforth much power over them, and justify his interference in the protection of the Miss Starinvilles with an authority, for want of which his exertions might otherwise be greatly cramped; and probably the excitement of this feeling produced some corresponding movement, for his horse suddenly stepped forward. The persons he watched were now within but a few paces of the road, when, plainly startled by the trampling of the horse, they both stopped. The woman turned; and Trefarley, in alarm lest they should escape him, by precipitately descending a path his horse, he well knew, could pursue but a very short way, lost not an in-

stant in hesitation, but turning the animal into the narrow track, plunged downwards with utter disregard of the difficulty of the attempt. The man, however, before him, showed no design of avoiding him, but raised his hand as if prepared to catch the bridle—a measure, indeed, almost unavoidable, since to pass at that spot was impossible. But Trefarley checked his horse before he came within the stranger's reach; for in the ferocious countenance now turned upwards with a malignant scowl, visible even through the dusk, he saw no feature resembling Leonard Claverham; while the raising of the cloak, by the sturdy arm thus suddenly extended, showed a form beneath which, though not taller, was evidently much more powerful than his.

Whether the female in the rear, who had again turned towards her companion, and now stood close behind him, were Jaqueline or not, Trefarley's ignorance of that damsel's face and person prevented him from ascertaining; and being uncertain on this point, and finding that

his hasty mistake with regard to the other, had not only urged him into an awkward dilemma for himself, since turning at this spot was utterly impracticable, but had also most inconveniently blocked up the way for these pedestrians, whoever they might be, he now attempted to colour his proceeding by inquiring of them, whether the path that way were fit for his horse. The man still staring upon him, made no reply; but the female behind, in a harsh and scornful voice, and in tones jangling with a foreign accent, exclaimed—

"You had best go down yourself and try!"

"Who are you?" asked Trefarley, offended by this reply; "and what business have you here?"

He addressed this chiefly to the man, who still stood full in the path before him. But though his frown appeared to grow each moment darker and more malicious, he did not speak; while the woman behind him exclaimed, in tones still more discordant than before—

"I have as much business here as you; so

turn, or let me pass! I cannot stand here all night!"

"I cannot turn here," cried Trefarley, who felt that he had indeed no right thus to bar her passage, and was convinced that it was Jaqueline who spoke; "so, if your mistress grants you the permission, Mademoiselle Jaqueline, of walking here with such companions as your present attendant, I have no wish to stop you; but you must either contrive to stand aside and let me pass, or you must go downwards, till there is room enough for each of us to pursue our own way."

A suppressed laugh was the only answer to this proposal; but the person to whom it was addressed seemed inclined to yield to it; for pulling her companion by his cloak, and whispering in his ear, they both proceeded several paces downwards, till the underwood being less thick, there was space enough for them to stand aside, and allow the horse to pass. Accordingly, they both ensconced themselves in the tangled thicket on one side.

"You have a pleasant ride before you, and a dry night to enjoy it!" muttered the female to Trefarley, in a low tone of derision, as he now pushed by them; while some rain drops pattering among the trees, and announcing an approaching shower, made the latter assertion as evidently ironical as the former, for the horse with difficulty kept his footing on the steep and rugged path.

Trefarley turned his head to reply, and to look closer at the mysterious speaker, and at that instant saw her pull back her comrade's arm, now raised with some weapon like a short thick club, and in the very act of striking at him behind.

Occupied with the difficulty of guiding his horse down the dark and narrow track, totally unarmed, and exposed to the ferocious assault of a dastardly assassin, who was aiming the blow from behind, which he had feared to offer at his face, Trefarley was both aware of the danger of his situation, and incensed at his cowardly assailant.

The stroke, however, which the female had thus intercepted was not repeated; and when, plunging forward at the imminent risk both of his horse's neck and his own, he had at last attained a rather broader and more even spot, where he instantly turned the animal about, he could no longer see the figures he had left. He at first fancied that the nook in which they stood was concealed by a winding of the path; but on pushing hastily up the steep, he plainly distinguished the place where they had left their traces on the half broken boughs, but where they now stood no longer.

Angry with their conduct towards himself, and more than ever alarmed at the character of those who, by Geoffry's account, were introduced in such clandestine style, and at such unseemly hours, into Warrington, Trefarley's first impulse was to hasten back to the house, and apprize its inhabitants of the visitors they might expect. He imagined, indeed, that he should overtake them; and examined as carefully as the darkness and the rain (now fast

descending) would permit, both sides of the road as he returned. But he searched in vain; neither sound nor sight met his ear or eye; and when he emerged from the wood, he could see sufficiently far on the road before him to be convinced that no person on foot could have preceded him. For a moment, therefore, he stopped, and began to hesitate on the expediency of spreading an alarm, which must create the very exposure he had wished to avoid. If Jaqueline were the person he had seen, she must have perceived his return to the house, and would, no doubt, quit her ruffianly companion, and avoid the discovery intended. If the people he had met were (as he confessed probable,) only two of the vagrants, whose abode he was determined next day to seek out, and take some means of removing, they had, most likely, already concealed themselves, and all search for them now would be ill-timed and abortive. He had given Geoffry every charge which prudence could suggest for the safety of the house, and the steward was himself suffici-

ently inclined to be watchful. Trefarley, therefore, again reluctantly pursued his homeward road, without discovering any farther signs of the vagrants, with whom he had held this short but perilous encounter.

When Agatha, according to Trefarley's advice, informed Madame de Rouvier that evening, that, as Mr. Claverham was unwilling to leave Warrington without bidding herself and her sister farewell, they were ready to receive his visit for that purpose, she watched her countenance, with something even more than curiosity, for the effect such an intimation would produce. But her scrutiny was vain. Madame de Rouvier, no doubt prepared for this declaration, was too profound an adept in dissimulation to betray what she really felt. At least, so Agatha thought, when she perceived that nothing but satisfaction appeared in her face; while she answered with alacrity, that Mr. Claverham would be delighted at such a permission, and that she would apprise him of it immediately. So saying, she instant-

ly quitted the room, without waiting any farther reply.

"Is she gone to fetch him now?" asked Agatha, with some perplexity and alarm.

"Perhaps she is," answered Clarina, roused to anxiety by the belief of Claverham's immediate approach; "and if so, dearest Agatha, let me beseech you to be careful in receiving him, not to betray any appearance of esteem or regard, of which we now, but too well, know him to be unworthy!"

Agatha coloured slightly, as she assured her sister with so much vehemence that such a charge was totally unnecessary, that Clarina was completely satisfied; and some time having elapsed without Claverham's appearance, both imagined they had mistaken Madame de Rouvier's intention, and were conversing more calmly on the course they should adopt in the interview, which they supposed would take place (as they had intended,) on the morrow, when some steps near the door of the drawing-room attracted their attention, and in a few

moments it was opened, and Leonard Claverham appeared there, supported by Madame de Rouvier and Jaqueline. The Miss Starinvilles had drawn near the fire as they conversed, and the light of that, and of the candles, beamed full on Claverham's face, as he thus entered. It was pale almost to ghastliness, and he moved feebly and with seeming difficulty, as he advanced between his two supporters, towards Agatha and Clarina, who, rising suddenly, stood in silence to receive him.

He also spoke not, but withdrawing his right arm from Jaqueline, he held out his hand alternately to the Miss Starinvilles, with an air of affection and respect, while they met his offered greeting with the pity his appearance was well calculated to excite. Not only the extreme paleness of his cheek, but the languor of his whole form, seemed to indicate illness and suffering; and as Agatha and Clarina gazed on him, they felt the strongest conviction that Mr. Drywinkle's story of his noctur-

nal walks with Jaqueline must be a mere fable. As this thought flashed across Agatha's mind, she looked on Jaqueline, and met her eyes deeply fixed upon herself, with an expression so scrutinizing, yet so ambiguous, that, confused at finding her reception of Claverham an object of curiosity to this woman, she hastily withdrew her eyes from a gaze at once offensive and distressing.

A chair was now arranged for Leonard, and a few words of mutual condolence having passed, all parties seated themselves, and Jaqueline leaving the room, Madame de Rouvier exerted herself to promote conversation, in which, by degrees, all joined. While Leonard's pale cheek, his bandaged head, and languid frame, conspired to give him an air of suffering well suited to produce commiseration, it was evident that sufficient attention had been bestowed on his personal appearance to prevent the favourable effect of such compassion from being lost; and, in fact, when the first emotion on seeing him had subsided, the Miss Starinvilles both

inwardly allowed they had scarcely ever beheld him to more advantage. His very fine features certainly suffered little by the paleness of their hue; his eyes, on the contrary, robbed of their usually too fierce expression, and softened into gentleness, were greatly improved by the change. The black bandage which on one side crossed a temple almost dazzlingly white, was hid on the other amid locks as dark as itself, that curled profusely over it. His left arm still rested in a sling; but though apparently feeble, his movements were easy and graceful, and when, in the course of their conversation, he became more animated, a tinge of colour rose through the paleness of his cheek, and bestowed on it every requisite of beauty, if not of health.

He spoke of Miss de Cruce's death, of Rybrent's departure to India, with marks of feeling; and mentioning his own wounds slightly, dwelt long and warmly on the kindness the Miss Starinvilles had shown him, in permitting him to be so long an inmate of their house.

He was not inclined, he said, to trespass on such hospitality and friendship more than was absolutely necessary, and therefore proposed, in a few days, to attempt removing to his own home.

"I intended, before I saw you," he added to Clarina, to whom he had addressed the whole of his conversation, "to have proposed undertaking this removal to-morrow; but the pain and fatigue I endured in merely descending the stairs here, makes me doubt my capability of supporting the motion of a carriage till another day or two." He looked anxiously at her as he stopped, and Clarina felt that she could not but accede to such a delay.

She therefore expressed these sentiments kindly and willingly; and, could she have experienced any affection for Claverham, she would have been repaid by the smile of satisfaction which lit up his handsome countenance at her reply. But she marked it not, as she turned to Agatha, whose sanction seemed want-

ing to this arrangement, and who had, for some time, sat as silent as she was grave. The truth was, she had been greatly struck, and, perhaps, more hurt than she was herself conscious, at the strange and evident alteration in Claverham's deportment towards her. Instead of showing her the attention he had been always wont to pay, and which she had certainly expected to find not diminished by their recent separation, and the events which had occurred since they met, from the moment after he had first greeted her, he had scarcely even glanced a look towards her, had never addressed her, but turning to Clarina, had spoken to her alone.

Even Clarina, though slow in observing this, seemed at last to notice it, as she turned to her sister for a corroboration of the consent she had just given, and Agatha, roused by the appeal, expressed calmly, but slightly, her acquiescence. The coldness of her manner, however, did not escape Claverham; and though his manner towards her, notwithstand-

ing all his efforts, bore palpable marks of constraint, he yet divided his discourse from that time more equally between all parties, and appeared so greatly to enjoy society, which formed, as he said, such a delightful contrast to the solitude of his sick room, that it was late before he made any motion to retire. Madame de Rouvier then summoned Jaqueline's attendance; and Agatha, remembering this woman's inquiring looks, and feeling now, perhaps, better able to stand the scrutiny, from which, in the first tumult of her feelings, she had shrunk, watched her on her entrance, and during her short stay in the room, with curiosity, if not interest. Again, therefore, Jaqueline's dark eyes met hers with a meaning which, though Agatha no longer avoided, she could not fathom; but Jaqueline, in her turn, now avoided an interchange of looks, which might, if continued, have attracted more observation than she desired. Leonard left the chamber as he had entered it, and the Miss Starinvilles almost immediately afterwards re-

tired to their own apartment; where Clarina warmly expressed the satisfaction she had felt in finding him so willing to depart, as soon as his health would permit; and the still greater pleasure she had experienced in being convinced by his appearance, that he had not been guilty of the gross dissimulation Geoffry's extraordinary tales had caused them to suspect. But Agatha was little inclined for conversation, and both sisters soon retired to rest.

CHAPTER IX.

MADAME DE ROUVIER had but just quitted the room next morning, after breakfast, when Trefarley, whose anxiety had caused him a sleepless night, appeared at Warrington. The answers of the Miss Starinvilles to his first eager questions, convinced him that nothing alarming had occurred.

He then told them of the figures he had seen the preceding evening, the short parley he had held with them (in which, however, he omitted all mention of the violence aimed at him), and finished by relating his disappointment at their sudden disappearance; adding, "Wherever Mademoiselle Jaqueline (if it were she) hid herself, it is at least evident that her companion in these nightly excursions is not

Mr. Claverham, which I rejoice at on every account."

"And we are equally convinced," interrupted Agatha, "that Jaqueline is as innocent herself of practices which Geoffry's fears can alone have fabricated; for she, as well as Leonard, was in this room, at the very time the people you mention were wandering about. Twice, indeed, she entered the apartment, and she could not, therefore, have been engaged in any nocturnal ramble."

Trefarley agreed in the complete exculpation which Agatha thus warmly pronounced; and both sisters then related the particulars of Claverham's visit, and described his reasonable behaviour; adding, that having now seen him, they were convinced that he was scarcely yet able to bear removal, but that he was inclined to attempt it as soon as possible.

Trefarley, pleased to find that some, at least, of his anticipations of danger had not been realised, now took his leave; telling them that he should probably return in a few hours,

having come thus early, only to leave his horse in the stables, while he pursued on foot his way through the ravines he meant narrowly to inspect, in search of the wanderers, of whose character and habits he had such strong, though secret reasons to judge unfavourably. The Miss Starinvilles saw him depart without any of the anxiety they would have endured, had they been aware of the circumstances he had concealed, or known that he carried in his pocket the pistols, which he felt might be necessary to protect himself from the insults or outrage which, though he determined not to provoke, he could not be assured he might not have to encounter. Indeed, had he before felt the certainty he now experienced, that neither Leonard Claverham nor Mademoiselle Jaqueline would be discovered in the secret haunts he was determined to explore, Trefarley would have provided himself with some companion on his expedition; but naturally fearless of danger, and anxious to avoid any public disclosure, which might be unpleasant to the Miss

Starinvilles, he had set out thus alone, on a quest which, from the specimen he had already seen of the characters he might find, might truly be considered somewhat perilous.

Clarina, on his departure, quickly betook herself to her apartment, where she was soon deeply occupied in writing to Rybrent all that had passed; but Agatha, relieved by solitude, and too much engrossed with her own thoughts to resort to occupation, for some time paced the room with a slow and pensive step, and then seating herself, and leaning her head on one hand, seemed, by thus covering her eyes, to wish to shun the slight abstraction which the sight of outward objects might create. She was, in fact, endeavouring to judge how far Claverham's regard, which, it appeared, she had now lost, had ever been important to her; and why his conduct towards her the preceding night, altered and strange as it might be, should have piqued and displeased her more than she had cared to own. She was still absorbed in considerations, which, it must be confessed,

were sufficiently perplexing, when casually raising her eyes, they rested on the large mirror, which now reflected nearly the whole of the room, and to her astonishment, she perceived in it the figure of Jaqueline, standing, indeed, quite still, but almost close behind her chair.

Agatha started from her seat, and turned towards the intruder; but the exclamation, both of surprise and anger about to escape her lips, was suddenly checked by a sign from Jaqueline; who, putting her finger on her mouth, appeared by her attitude to intreat for silence. Agatha paused with amazement not wholly unmixed with dread; though the latter sensation could not but subside, as she contemplated the very beautiful features, and striking form before her; the former beaming with an expression of intense and anxious interest, and the latter bending forward, as in earnest supplication for the audience she appeared to demand with so much secrecy.

Even the questions, so ready to occur, died away on Agatha's lip, while she thus gazed on

this singular woman, upon whose face a smile of unusual meaning played, as she perceived that Agatha, almost indeed unconsciously, obeyed the signal of silence she had made.

"Miss Starinville," at last she said, in broken English, and in whispered tones, "I have much —much more than you can conjecture, to impart to you! Will you then allow me an opportunity of conversing with you?"

She paused, but Agatha was so much struck, both by her manner and expression of intense anxiety, that she remained silent.

"The time passes!" again murmured Jaqueline in a whisper, "yet I must needs gain the permission I ask! Will you grant my request, Miss Starinville?"

Agatha's senses were now roused; yet it was in tones almost as low as those of Jaqueline that she replied, "What should you have to tell me, Jaqueline, in this mysterious mode? Can I be of any use to you; and is it of your own affairs you would speak? I will assuredly listen to you, but not with all this secrecy.

There can be no occasion for concealment; tell me, therefore, openly, what it is you would say!"

"My business," cried the Frenchwoman, in a whisper still lower than before, "is to speak of him who does not speak for himself! whose very existence depends on you; yet, who is reluctantly constrained, at present, to conceal an attachment which has long burned like fire in his breast, and which alone has retarded a departure, nothing else could have so long delayed!"

Leonard's constrained and mysterious manner on the preceding evening flashed vividly on Agatha's startled thought, and a deep colour mantled on her cheek. Yet, what extraordinary cause should make him thus conceal an attachment, there seemed no reason he should not, if he felt it, avow? and why should he choose such an emissary as this woman to reveal it?

Agatha looked at Jaqueline as these doubts arose, but the keen and searching gaze which she saw directed on her own burning cheek, was so oppressive, that her eyes again sunk to

the ground, while the crimson on her face grew deeper. At last, however, in sentences somewhat broken and confused, she said, "She could not understand who should send any such message to her, as Jaqueline had delivered; and that, if the intelligence at which she had hinted, were of no greater importance, there could be no occasion for any farther interview."

"My intelligence, Miss Starinville," replied Jaqueline, in an impressive, and even solemn manner, "is of the deepest importance, both to yourself and others. Life and death are concerned in it. You *must* hear me—ay, and in solitude and secrecy too,—and you must promise, even now, the interview I ask!" Agatha was over-awed by the commanding manner which Jaqueline had assumed, and to which her lofty features and darkly-brilliant eyes added an almost irresistible influence.

"Well!" she faintly exclaimed, "speak, then, if I must so absolutely hear;" and she tried to force a smile, as she was about to re-seat herself.

But Jaqueline's manner grew more hurried

as she replied; "I cannot speak here! I am subject every moment to interruption! But, by all that is sacred, Miss Starinville, I conjure you not to refuse to listen to facts it is most essential for you to know—you little imagine how essential for others to explain!" Jaqueline paused, while her feelings seemed deeply moved. "To-morrow, at this hour," she now continued in a slow and distinct tone, "I will wait for you in that covered walk yonder," (and she pointed through the glass door;) "Will you promise to meet me there?" she asked in a voice of low but deep entreaty. "I ask but one hour's conversation, Miss Starinville," she added in a calmer manner, perceiving that Agatha still lingered to reply: "should you refuse me, the consequences will be more serious, more frightful, than I can now explain to you. Will you then promise me?"

"Yes!" said Agatha faintly, and with a hesitation, which seemed as if it would recal the word, which a sensation, almost amounting to awe, had forced from her. But she had no

time to withdraw the consent thus given; Jaqueline had, for an instant, bowed her head in thanks, and quitted the room without another word; leaving Agatha standing in astonishment which almost led her to doubt the reality of the scene which had just occurred. That Claverham was attached to her, notwithstanding his cold and altered manner, even more deeply than she had ever imagined, was the result most vividly impressed on her mind, from the message thus strangly sent; and in the serious thoughts this produced, pain, rather than pleasure, far predominated. She recoiled, too, from the seemingly clandestine proceeding in which she found herself engaged, and her first impulse led her to exclaim, as she threw herself on a chair, "I will not keep a promise thus extracted from me! Claverham must speak himself, if he has really any message to send!" But the whispered words of Jaqueline still seemed to ring in her ears, as she now recalled the solemnity and seriousness of her address; her emphatic assurance, that life and death

hung on her intelligence, and the strong and evident emotion which accompanied this assertion.

"Was it possible," Agatha thought, "that Jaqueline herself entertained an attachment for Claverham, which made her situation as his chosen confidant so peculiarly trying; and was this reserved, but sensitive being, thus acting a part of such high self-command?" Much of her evident agitation—the exaltation of her manner—the sort of desperation with which she had overborne all opposition to her request, might, this way, perhaps, be solved. But what were the facts so essential for Agatha to know? Madame de Rouvier's ambiguous conduct forced itself here upon her remembrance. The alteration in her manner, so marked on their return; her evident, and, it would seem, fruitless, attentions to Claverham—with these circumstances, Agatha now coupled Jaqueline's looks of increasing interest and concern for her and her sister, since Miss de Cruce's death; and she felt a conviction that this woman (intrusted, for some reason she could not fathom, with Leonard's confi-

dence,) was also earnestly desirous to apprise her of designs on Madame de Rouvier's part, which might indeed be important for her to know. "She spoke of her disclosure, as being equally essential to others likewise," thought Agatha; "and, alas! who can tell how necessary it may be, both for Clarina and myself, to be made acquainted with the designs and practices of a person, on whom, unfortunately, we are now obliged so greatly to depend!"

Agatha, besides possessing all the curiosity inherent in her sex, was naturally of a bold and ardent character, ever more ready to grasp at difficulties than to avoid them. No sooner, therefore, had this new train of expectation opened before her, than her spirit was on fire to pursue it. "I have not sought this confidence," she mused; "it is, on the contrary, absolutely forced upon me. But I shall, at least, by this means, understand the motives and conduct of those with whom we have to deal; and unravel the mysterious proceedings

which we have found so disgusting and degrading to witness. For Clarina's sake and my own, I will not refuse to receive intelligence, which may, indeed, prove as essential to us as this woman affirms, nor reject cautions which she must surely offer at least from disinterested motives."

To this hasty conclusion, Agatha's impetuous disposition having now conducted her, she determined to keep the appointment with the secrecy she had made it; and to acquaint Clarina and Trefarley with the result only of an interview, to which she instinctively dreaded their prudence, or their fears, might object.

She firmly resolved, however, that she would receive no message from Claverham of any kind; and that, should Jaqueline refuse the information she had thus pressed on her, unless on condition of pleading his cause, she would instantly break up the conference. The morning hours wore away in a solitude scarcely perceived by Agatha, whose thoughts were thus busily engaged, till Clarina's entrance roused her from

her musings. She had, however, scarcely addressed her, when Trefarley was again announced. He seemed fatigued, and was evidently little pleased, though, he said, he had succeeded in his undertaking. But he confessed that his suspicions concerning the people for whom he had sought, had been greatly increased, rather than diminished, by the discovery he had made of their abode. It was a single hut, he said, ingeniously and substantially constructed of rough branches torn from the thick and tangled wood which clothed the deep dell, on one side of which this lonely habitation stood, so artfully concealed, that, notwithstanding his anxious and eager search, it would, probably, have escaped his notice, but that one thin and transient gust of blue smoke, rising from the interior, caught his eye, and directed his attention to the spot. A tree of remarkable height growing near the place whence this smoke had thus opportunely appeared, served as a more permanent guide; yet he had still experienced considerable difficulty in reaching

the spot; which, at length, he found was about mid-way up a deep and narrow ravine, one side of which was covered with thick but leafless wood; while the other presented an almost perpendicular face of bare rock. At the bottom flowed a small stream, and it was by the edge of this rivulet he had at last discovered the rude and scarcely perceptible track that led to this solitary abode. After pursuing its winding course some time, a sudden turn upwards from the stream had, in a few more paces, brought him to this hut; where his own surprise at the sequestered and singular dwelling he beheld, was equally and more unpleasantly shared by the persons on whose retirement he thus suddenly intruded. On both sides of this habitation, as well as on the steep ground behind it, the tangled underwood pressed so closely, that it was difficult for the eye immediately to discern where the work of nature ceased, and that of art began; while the boughs of the taller trees crossed each other so thickly over its roof, as to render the latter covering almost unnecessary,

and utterly invisible from above. A small portion of ground, however, in front of the building, (if such it might be called,) was entirely cleared, save an ancient elm, the identical tree which had directed Trefarley's course, thus standing alone in the centre of this sloping square, which, inclosed on both sides by the wood whence it was taken, formed a small green before the hut. At the foot of this elm sat a female, whose dress and appearance were as wild as the scenery around her. A black cloak of coarse cloth, fastened at the throat by a silver clasp, which seemed also to hold together the ends of a high and full ruff, enveloped the whole of her figure on Trefarley's approach; but, as she started up, the folds of this mantle being thrown for a moment aside, a dark petticoat appeared beneath, surmounted by a scarlet jacket, whose tight sleeve seemed to incase an arm of no slight power, as it was stretched suddenly forth in the effort to rise. Trefarley had stopped instinctively on seeing her; and, as she stood erect before him, he now owned to the

Miss Starinvilles he had seldom seen a figure, on whose retirement he would less willingly have intruded. Her dark hair and skin, her large ear-rings, and the wildness of her mien, seemed to denote her of the gipsey tribe; but her dress corresponded with none of that vagrant class he had ever seen; while her occupation was as little consonant to their wonted habits; for she had been apparently deeply engaged in reading what seemed a newspaper, as it still lay on the ground, where, in her surprise, she had flung it.

A shade of fear, Trefarley thought, crossed her murky brow, as she started to her feet, but it passed immediately away, and was succeeded by an expression of cool determination, as she glanced first towards the hut, and then fixed on Trefarley a pair of eyes, whose fierce expression was strangely increased by her grotesque and hideous head-dress. This was a bright red cap, which, covering the whole of her forehead, pressed heavily on her eyebrows, and left but a few brown and matted locks visible behind her ears.

So coarse was her weather-proof visage, that it was difficult to judge of her age; but she might have passed the prime of youth, though her square and robust form had evidently lost none of its vigour. Startled as she was at the sight of Trefarley, she was yet the first to speak; while, advancing one step, so as to bar his passage, she demanded, in a voice and accent he instantly recognised as those he had heard the evening before, "What brings you here?"

Trefarley was about to answer, but her sharp tones had roused those within the hut, for the door suddenly opened, and he beheld the same ferocious-looking villain who had accompanied her the previous evening, and who now stared on him with a mixed expression, in which it were hard to say whether surprise or malignity predominated. His female companion, however, waved her hand impatiently towards him, and, obedient to her signal, he withdrew and closed the door without speaking, though the next moment Trefarley saw his

malicious face anxiously peering through a small square aperture which served as a window to the hut, and even fancied he could distinguish another head in the gloomy atmosphere behind. "What brings you here, I say?" again demanded in a sharper key the formidable amazon, while she folded her arms in her thick black cloak, leaving not a vestige of other colour visible about her, except the flaming cap which surmounted her resolute countenance.

"I knew," Trefarley calmly and firmly replied, "that your abode was to be found among these wild recesses, and I came purposely to discover it."

"And what want you of us?" interrupted the woman, before he could finish his sentence. "Would you have your fortune told?" she asked with a scornful smile, which grew more taunting as she added ambiguously, "Our power over it may be greater than you deem!" Trefarley could not but feel that his situation was somewhat hazardous, while a glance of the

speaker's eye towards the hut, in which he was aware two miscreants, at least, were watching his motions, rendered her last dark sentence sufficiently intelligible. He knew himself armed, however, and hesitated not boldly to pursue the inquiries he came purposely to make. "I do not ask my fortune at your hands," he therefore coolly replied; "but I require to know, what is your business here, and whence do you come?" A harsh laugh was the only answer to this; and Trefarley, a little exasperated, continued, "I have authority sufficient from the proprietors of this ground to make this demand, and it is easy for me to procure means to break up this suspicious establishment, if I do not obtain the satisfaction I have come, thus peaceably, to seek."

His determined manner, and the purport of his words, seemed to have effect on the wild female he addressed, for she answered less rudely than before, though still in a bold and reckless tone—"Our business here is that of all our tribe: we can tell your destinies, if

we do not rule them: and, think you, our hands are not as dexterous as our spirits are enlightened? We do not lack employment among your dull and stationary clowns."

"But whence do you come—what is your country—and how long have you been here?" cried Trefarley hastily, with increasing suspicion. A mischievous smile wreathed the dun lip of the uncouth being before him, partially discovering a row of ivory teeth, as she replied in a scoffing tone, "Do you ask the country of the gipsies? We wander over sea and land; and wherever the sun shines, or the wind blows, is our home! We come to-day, and are gone to-morrow; and would you have dates and periods of us? We do not measure our proceedings by your almanacks; and peradventure, when you come with the force you threaten, you may not find a trace of us remaining!" She paused, and Trefarley, struck with her flighty but emphatic manner, and baffled by her vague reply, stood for a few moments silent. "I have answered your in-

quiries," she continued, and her cracked voice sounded peevishly; "Have you more to ask, or will you not now leave us to the solitude you have little right to disturb?"

"Tell me how many you are," asked Trefarley, "and I will be satisfied."

"We are four," answered the woman shortly, and turning round, as if resolved to avoid all further inquiry, she stalked into the hut, and closed the door.

A moment afterwards Trefarley saw her face behind that of the man who, glancing through this narrow window, had witnessed in total silence, and almost without motion, the whole of the conference. Satisfied that he had now obtained all the answers he could expect, and resolved on taking immediate means to dislodge, with better strength than he at present possessed, a set of vagrants, whose appearance was as formidable as singular, Trefarley turned, and descended some paces of the narrow track, before he again looked round to take a last view of the strange abode he was leaving. But it was already hid from his sight by the in-

tervening branches and the rapid descent, and he reached Warrington without impediment, and with only the fatigue consequent on the long and difficult ramble he had made. He now gave the Miss Starinvilles all the above details, and added his opinion, that these strangers were not gipsies as they professed.

"They are foreigners however, certainly," he continued, "and I firmly believe them to be French people. It was their emblem of liberty, perhaps, of which we have heard so much, that disfigured that rough female's head; and I own, I thought for a moment of poor Phœbe's story, when I espied her scarlet sleeve."

Agatha and Clarina shuddered; and Trefarley, vexed at having thus unwarily aroused their slumbering fears, now laughed at his own surmises. He should apply immediately, he told them, to Mr. Eldridge, a neighbouring magistrate, and a shrewd and active man. Armed with his advice and authority, he would take effective measures for removing these suspicious vagrants from the parish at least, if not from the country altogether. Clarina listened to all this with a

trembling interest, in which Agatha's pre-occupied mind could not wholly permit her to share; yet there was a sweetness in her smile, as she thanked Trefarley for his watchful friendship, which brought a flush of colour to his cheek, and hastened the farewell he was already rather abruptly pronouncing.

"But one more day," he exclaimed, "and I trust that Mr. Claverham's departure, and the dispersion of these dangerous foreigners, will leave you as peaceful and safe as I—as your best friends could wish!"

He hurried away, and the Miss Starinvilles had scarcely time to prepare for dinner.

The evening again brought a visit from Claverham, who as before appeared to direct his whole attention to Clarina. But Agatha, furnished in her own mind with a clue, however mysterious, to his conduct, now fancied she could by various tokens detect that all in his demeanour was not natural. He seemed, indeed, to devote himself wholly to Clarina; but an occasional glance of peculiar expression directed

towards herself, proved that he was neither unconscious nor heedless of her presence, though for some strange reason he appeared reluctant to address her. On more exact observation, she began also to suspect that his apparent illness and debility were greatly exaggerated, if not wholly assumed; and Jaqueline's expression concerning the delay of his departure was now perfectly intelligible to her. She perceived that he occasionally moved his arm in its sling with an ease and vigour that showed such a support to be quite unnecessary; and though his cheek was still unusually pale, on stricter scrutiny, she felt by no means sure that the sickliness of its hue was not artificial. In short, whether he was himself less on his guard, or that her awakened suspicions rendered her inspection more acute, she became fully persuaded that he wanted nothing of his former health and strength but the outward signs of it, which she was convinced he could at pleasure resume.

These remarks occupied Agatha most un-

pleasantly. The evident symptoms of artifice in Claverham's appearance and manner disgusted and displeased her; and offended at supposing herself the object of them, she resolved more firmly than ever to receive no communication from him, which could make her a party to such dissimulation. Therefore she again hesitated whether she should not altogether refuse Jaqueline's proffered information, important as it might be. She watched anxiously for this woman's appearance, not without hopes of gathering from her looks, which she imagined she should now better understand, some indication of her real feelings; but Claverham entered the drawing-room with only Madame de Rouvier; and when Jaqueline, late in the evening, obeyed her mistress's summons, the expression of her sallow face was more cold and monotonous than ever. She never looked towards Agatha during the short time she remained in the apartment; and as the latter gazed on her, she found it difficult to believe that the frigid and repulsive countenance she now beheld,

could be the same which in the morning had overcome all her opposition by its animated and almost resistless expression. But the very wonder and curiosity which this excited turned once more the scale of Agatha's wavering resolution, and she again determined to receive the confidence which this singular woman was thus anxious to repose in her.

Totally unused, however, to any concealment of her purposes from Clarina, on retiring to their apartment, Agatha was about to break the secrecy she had in the morning resolved to keep, and to inform her sister of the meeting she had promised. Accordingly, she began by a panegyric upon Jaqueline, which seemed a natural exordium to the declaration of the interview she had promised her; but Clarina (whose worst suspicions had revived at the casual hint Trefarley had dropped concerning the odd resemblance between the dress of the gipsy-woman and that Phœbe had described) expressed so warmly, and, as Agatha thought, so unreasonably, her sentiments of fear and disgust

towards Jaqueline, who had certainly participated in that transaction, that, after some vain attempts to moderate her sister's prejudices, Agatha, hopeless of overcoming all the objections she foresaw would be raised against her intended conference, relapsed into the silence she had been about to break, and both sisters retired to rest.

CHAPTER X.

Soon after breakfast the next morning, when Madame de Rouvier had quitted the room, Agatha, perceiving that the hour of her appointment approached, said with the hesitation and embarrassment which an ingenuous mind naturally feels at the first departure from its usual sincerity, that as the morning was so remarkably fine, she should take a stroll in the garden, while Clarina pursued her daily letter writing.

Clarina, wholly unsuspicious, took little notice of her sister's hesitation, or of the deep colour which dyed her cheek; but, when having reached their own apartment and equipped herself, Agatha tied on her bonnet, and approach-

ing her sister, kissed her and bade her good morning, with an excitement of feeling she could not totally suppress, Clarina laughingly observed, "We part so seldom, Agatha, that truly we ought now and then to take a separate walk in the garden, or we shall grow as indivisible as the twin-cherry of the poet."

Agatha smiled: but her air was constrained and her face glowed with crimson, while inwardly resolving to atone for this temporary concealment, by divulging fully to her sister the result of the conference to which she was hastening, she abruptly left the room and proceeded to the garden.

Towards the end of the enclosed walk which she now entered, she perceived the figure of Jaqueline half hid among the bushes, within whose concealment she was evidently waiting her approach. This path was over-arched by a thickly tangled canopy of luxuriant and fragrant shrubs, which formed in summer a shade impenetrable to the brightest rays of noon. But the wintry and yellow sunlight now flickered

through the leafless twigs, while the sides, lately presenting an impervious wall of verdure, admitted here and there a sight of the parallel walks, whose contiguity in the summer was totally hid. The air was bracing and exhilarating, and Agatha's spirits and courage mounted at every step as she advanced towards the person from whom she expected to derive information of importance both to herself and her sister; while her increasing self-confidence gave her security in checking Jaqueline's conversation on any topics but those she desired to hear.

Yet a chill, almost like fear, for an instant damped her rising spirits, at the total silence with which Jaqueline, as she approached, received her; while the large straw hat she always wore, flapped more than usually (as Agatha thought,) over her face, and rendered its expression very difficult to catch. However, she speedily shook off this feeling, while without waiting for her companion to speak, she frankly addressed her, saying, "I am come,

as you see, according to my promise, Jaqueline; and, with one restriction only, will willingly listen to all you have to tell me."

Agatha was proceeding to explain the limitation she intended, but Jaqueline in a low tone said, "We must leave this walk, Miss Starinville; it is open to many eyes and ears! You shall then make your conditions, and I will obey them." As she said this, she turned rather swiftly down a descending path which led to some lower grounds familiar to Agatha, but from which neither the house nor the garden were visible.

Satisfied with Jaqueline's assurance, and observing in her face, which, as she now walked by her side, she had better opportunity to scan, the same kind of subdued feeling which marked her accents, Agatha followed, or rather accompanied her, without farther observation, till, having accomplished their descent down a steep and rather rugged path, Jaqueline slackened her pace, and seemed hesitating as if to speak.

But Agatha now seized the moment to explain, which she did shortly, but very firmly, that she would receive neither message nor communication of any kind from Mr. Claverham, though she was willing to hear the other details which Jaqueline had offered to disclose, and which might tend, she trusted, to clear up proceedings, whose suspicious and mysterious character had lately caused much uneasiness both to her sister and herself. As Agatha spoke, she watched with eagerness the face of Jaqueline, whose eyes were averted, and over whose brow a very dark shade passed, as she thus alluded to Leonard. But when she proceeded to express her desire to hear the rest of what Jaqueline might unfold, this sinister expression gave way to a beaming though suppressed smile of satisfaction; and while a bright flash of colour changed her sallow cheek to a glowing red, her eyes, now turned on Miss Starinville, played with deep and varying emotion. Yet it was still in low accents

that she said, "I have no wish to speak of Leonard Claverham. His name is as odious to me as it may justly be to you." Then checking herself, she added in a solemn manner, while again her countenance wore a more doubtful expression, "You are surrounded by dangers on every side, Miss Starinville! Will you receive the assistance of a friend, who would extricate you, even though by means you may perhaps consider perilous?"

"What dangers," cried Agatha, hurriedly, "do you mean? and who is the friend to whom you allude?"

"The friend of whom I speak you do not yet know," answered Jaqueline; "but the dangers which threaten you I can even now explain. Alas! in doing so, I must perforce unfold to you the guilt of her whose faults I would willingly conceal!" Jaqueline stopped, and while Agatha respected the feelings which evidently caused her reluctance to accuse her mistress, she yet waited with all the

impatience of curiosity and alarm for the explanation thus strangely promised.

At length, Jaqueline in a low tone proceeded. "You have but now charged me not to speak of Leonard Claverham. But you greatly err, if you imagine I am commissioned by him to address you. Must I keep his secret devices from you? How, then, shall I describe to you your dangers?"

Agatha, greatly shocked, now muttered some words of release from her former prohibition, and Jaqueline then continued a discourse, which soon became a narration of Madame de Rouvier's real history, widely different, as we have seen, from that which Agatha and her sister had so quickly and so ingeniously fabricated. With eager curiosity but increasing horror did she now listen to the details of Madame de Rouvier's early and little honourable marriage—her conduct, both before and after her husband's return—their separation—her brilliant but profligate career in Paris. Still the

disgust, great as it was, which Agatha now felt towards her, was equalled, if not surpassed, by that with which she regarded the person who was thus coolly, and, as it seemed, for no reason, betraying the guilt of a mistress, to whom she had professed such attachment; and her indignation rising every moment higher, she at last exclaimed—

"For what purpose, false woman, are you telling me all this? Is it to prove yourself utterly unworthy of the confidence you seem to expect I should repose in you, by meanly betraying the faults of a person, who, whatever be her crimes, has, at least, been kind to you?"

Jaqueline's face for a moment grew deadly pale, and she appeared to shudder at the reproach thus hurled at her. But Agatha's animated and beautiful countenance, flashing as it was with anger, while she stopped, and standing still and erect, poured forth this indignant apostrophe, apparently wakened approval rather than remorse in her to whom it was addressed; and again she continued in a

calm and determined tone, "You cannot, Miss Starinville, learn what you have to fear, till you know how to appreciate justly those in whom you trust. I have, for your sake alone, apprised you of the real character of your present companion—it would seem your only guardian: and now will you look to Madame de Rouvier to shield you from your impending dangers?"

"I know of no dangers," cried Agatha, softened by this remark, but still rather peevishly. "You have informed me of nothing which it can really interest me to know. If I have perils to apprehend, why do you not at once acquaint me what they are? Madame de Rouvier may be—I fear she is, all that you have said. But why should she injure me? or, if she had such an inclination, how should she obtain the power?"

Agatha coloured, while a fresh suspicion of Madame de Rouvier's possible influence over Claverham flashed across her mind. But Jaqueline either did not notice, or did not understand

this transient blush; indeed she seemed wholly absorbed in her own emotions, while she said in a still lower voice, "Her power is greater far than you imagine. Even now she has emissaries within her reach, willing and wicked enough to execute whatever she may purpose, and as able as they are willing."

Agatha shook with fear, as she suddenly recollected Trefarley's account of the supposed gipsies, whose strange retreat he had so lately discovered. Yet she did not speak, but listened with trembling attention, while Jaqueline now confirmed her worst suspicions by explaining shortly yet distinctly, that two Frenchmen of desperate fortunes, accompanied by a female of their own country, and an adroit gipsy-lad who served to veil their purposes, had established themselves for the last month within a short distance of Warrington. "I need not accurately describe to you their abode," continued Jaqueline, while a contemptuous sneer crossed her haughty counte-

nance; "I dare say, your officious adviser, Mr. Trefarley, has done that already!"

Agatha started at the accurate knowledge this betrayed; but remembering Trefarley's intentions concerning these people, she felt her courage revive, and hastily exclaimed, "Yes, thank Heaven, we have a friend in him! Even this very day he is to dislodge these mischievous foreigners—" She stopped short, thinking she had gone too far, and watched with some fear as well as anxiety the dark meaning which clouded Jaqueline's brow, as for some minutes she walked in silence by her side. At last, however, the latter coldly said, "Mr. Eldridge, the only magistrate near, is absent to-day from his house. To-morrow your champion may be too late!"

"I will go no farther with you!" cried Agatha, with a sudden movement of astonishment and terror. "You are, indeed, telling me of dangers, but I see not the meaning of them; and it is plain enough you are not willing we should

be delivered from them. I will hear no more!" and she turned as if to go back to the house. But Jaqueline said calmly, but firmly—

"Miss Starinville, you *must* hear what I have more to impart; and you will find, that if I point out to you the mine which is ready to burst beneath your feet, it is only in order to show you the means to escape it."

Again awed by the solemnity of her impressive tone, Agatha turned: and with the most intense and terrified interest did she now listen to the development of an atrocious conspiracy of which, it appeared, she was herself the intended victim. The concealed ruffians whom Jaqueline mentioned, had, she said, left their own country at the expense, and under the auspices of Mr. Starinville.

"Of my father!" interrupted Agatha, with a shriek of astonishment. "What, then, can I have to fear from them?" Jaqueline took no notice of this demand, but distinctly proceeded. They were sent by Mr. Starinville

for political purposes only, and they had also reasons of their own for quitting their country, which it were unnecessary, she said, at present to detail. It was sufficient to explain, that a secret nocturnal intercourse having been easily arranged on their arrival (which took place but a few days before Miss de Cruce's death,) between them and Madame de Rouvier, Claverham, whose wounds already promised rapidly to heal, became apprized of it; and while he willingly furthered the original object of their coming, by assuring them of his open support, as soon as his health should admit of more active measures, he formed in secret, and gradually prevailed on Madame de Rouvier to join in a dark and iniquitous plot against Agatha's peace, the accomplishment of which the conspirators hoped was at hand.

"These strangers," continued Jaqueline, "hold frequent and easy intercourse with Warrington. Do you remember, Miss Starinville, the alarm which Phœbe raised? The re-

solute Frenchwoman, who dealt the blow that night to the frightened girl, had no other means of avoiding instant discovery !"

Jaqueline here paused; but tears of anger, grief, and fear, for some time choked Agatha's utterance; and it was at last in broken tones that she said; "As you seem thus to know and to assist in all their manœuvres, Jaqueline, will you tell me why Mr. Claverham wishes such evil as you hint at to befall me? I interfere not with his designs on Madame de Rouvier—Why should they do me any ill—and what is it they meditate ?"

"Leonard Claverham," said Jaqueline, speaking in a louder tone than she had before used, "has no designs on Madame de Rouvier. It is your sister Clarina to whom he aspires—and he has even now concerted the measures by which you are forcibly to be seized by his accomplices, and removed away—perhaps for ever ! There is only one remedy—" But Jaqueline suddenly stopped, on beholding the effect which this frightful intimation produced

on the unfortunate Agatha. Disgust, fear, sorrow, and anger, had each by turns, and with conflicting force, agitated her breast during the whole of this exciting conversation; but the native strength of her spirit had stood against all, and had enabled her both to ask and listen to particulars, each more and more alarming and offensive. All that spirit, however, seemed now to have fled, while she stood pale as death, and utterly speechless at this last bewildering assertion.

Jaqueline herself, apparently alarmed at the shock she had inflicted, stood for a time irresolute; but quickly rousing herself, she offered the support, of which Miss Starinville's almost fainting frame seemed in immediate need. But Agatha pushed the arm thus proffered in horror away, and her colour and her courage again mounted as she cried, " This is incredible! It is folly to believe it! What motive you can have for uttering such falsehood is as incomprehensible to me as all the rest of your dark and treacherous conduct. I am sorry I have listened so far to

one who, by her own showing, has been an unscrupulous and unblushing confederate in the very schemes she is now betraying. But I do not,—I will not believe in such schemes! Why should Leonard wish—how should he dare attempt the violence you talk of? And Clarina —could she join?——" Agatha hid her face in her hands and wept aloud. Jaqueline was evidently moved, and her voice sounded brokenly, as she exclaimed, "Alas! my dear Miss Starinville, Claverham dares all that is base—and, indeed, with the means he has at his command, and in your unprotected and forlorn condition, his risk is not great; while his measures, believe me, are but too well concerted. Are you so simple as to ask why he should wish the removal of one whose presence might not only prove an obstacle to his designs on her sister, but would also"—and Jaqueline here lowered her voice—"divide her inheritance?"

Agatha shuddered deeply with horror too great for utterance. Her face again deadly white, but lovely in its paleness, was displayed, as

her hands dropped from it with the sudden shock of terror, but it was bent downwards, and her whole attitude, the very image of despair, spoke the feelings her lips could not articulate. Jaqueline seemed to respect the anguish she had created, and both stood for some time in silence. At length Agatha raised her heavy eyes from the earth, and fixed them on Jaqueline's sallow face, while she said in an unbroken but hollow tone, "Why have you told me all this? Is it for the pleasure of witnessing the agony it must cause—of beholding the terror of a victim, who, alas, seems to have no earthly protector? Or have you yourself brought me down here, (and Agatha gazed wildly and eagerly round,) that I may fall even now into the toils spread for me?" The terror of the hapless girl seemed at each word to increase, as a hasty glance showed her that, entirely engrossed by the extraordinary details to which she had been listening, she had gradually and unconsciously followed her companion, till they had reached those intricate passes which Trefarley had described

as forming the entrance to the narrow cleft where he had found the ruffian's covert, to which she was now persuaded Jaqueline was leading her. With the strength of sudden despair she instantly turned to dart homewards; but Jaqueline caught her hand respectfully yet firmly, while she said; "I should not have explained to you Claverham's designs, Miss Starinville, had I wished to lead you into his power."

Agatha, struck by this remark, once more turned round to speak. Jaqueline waited not, however, for her reply, but continued in a hurried voice, while her brilliant eyes flashed with animation, and her cheek burned with eagerness, "I have told you of your dangers, only to offer you an escape! I have a friend who would lay down his life for you. Let me, I beseech you, lead you to him! Under his protection you may fly to your father, your only natural guardian. But let him, I conjure you, speak for himself, and plead the cause he has so much at heart!" As Jaqueline spoke, she attempted to draw Miss Starinville forward. But Agatha positively

refused to advance another step. Her head and heart both throbbed, indeed, with fear, yet she strove to speak calmly, as she said, "This is as absurd as it is unintelligible! Unhand me, Jaqueline, and let me return without hindrance to the house! I will inform Geoffry—and send for Mr. Trefarley. I am now on my guard, and while I thank you for warnings which must, no doubt, be friendly, I yet cannot accept the strange protection you offer me." Agatha trembled greatly as she thus endeavoured to assume an air of security she did not feel; and Jaqueline, perceiving the struggle she was making, pushed her advantage. "Neither Mr. Trefarley nor your steward can protect you from the well-concerted plot which is to be executed this very day!" she cried.

"How do you know all this?" demanded Agatha, with coolness like despair.

"It matters little," answered Jaqueline, with increasing vehemence, "how I obtain my information: but if you wish to know, I saw the wretches in question last evening, and having

heard their plans, I arranged mine. Will you go with me, Miss Starinville, to the only being who can and will protect you?"

"No!" faintly, but firmly, answered Agatha, as she attempted, but in vain, to extricate her hand from Jaqueline's grasp; "I will go no farther with you!"

"Once more, I entreat—I earnestly beseech you," cried Jaqueline, in a stifled voice, "to accompany me without resistance! I have told you but the truth—I offer you life—protection—happiness—instead of the lot to which you are doomed! Do you persist in refusing me?"

"Let me go!" cried Agatha, with a shriek of terror, while she struggled to disengage herself; but Jaqueline, holding tightly the hand she had taken in one of her own, with the other applied a small and shrill whistle to her mouth, and waited in evident agitation, but in silence, for the result. Agatha would fain have entreated, but the words died away on her quivering lips; and by the time the signal was

answered by the appearance of the woman and her companion, described by Trefarley, she sunk into their arms with all the unconsciousness, though not the security of death. At their approach, Jaqueline released her hand, and darted off with the rapidity of lightning.

CHAPTER XI.

The woman thus left with Agatha applied such remedies as she was able, and in a foreign accent, but fluent English, made repeated inquiries; but finding that all endeavours to reanimate her charge were vain, she at length proposed to her companion to remove her as she was, till they should reach the little stream, whose waters might revive her. To this the man assented, and the unhappy Agatha was first awakened to the horror of her situation by the startling sensation of the cold and trickling drops which bathed her face from the coarse but seemingly kind hand of her strange conductress. She had scarcely sufficiently revived to mark the appearance of these strangers, and to notice that Jaqueline was gone, when she already uttered the

most touching entreaties to them to allow her to depart. But the woman smiled, as she replied, that was impossible; while the man evidently understood not a word of what was said, and only answered by a cold and ghastly stare.

No spark of humanity threw a gleam of pity over his dull and savage face, during the wild and ardent supplications, and the impassioned gestures, of this lovely and helpless girl; and having once gazed on his countenance with eager scrutiny, she felt every hope die within her, and could look on it no more. Yet no particular circumstances of natural deformity occurred to render thus revolting the expression of the face from which she turned. His features were regular and not ill-formed, and except that a large scar disfigured one of his cheeks, no outward defects were there. But his eyes were frightfully large, and placed at wide interval in the square and lowring forehead which contained them; and through them a spirit glared, cruel and malignant as that of a fiend. They were besides, always open. Scarcely a wink,

even for a moment, veiled their terrible gaze, while their expression of deep and cold ferocity neither varied nor ceased.

It would seem that murder, once indulged as a passion in the human mind, gradually sinks it, by a righteous retribution, to a level with the beasts such beings but too closely resemble; and that a thirst for blood then becomes no figurative idea, but a fearful and living reality. This wretch, at least, might have exemplified such a position. He had dyed his hands in the blood of his fellow-citizens, till his appetite for slaughter absorbed every other feeling; nor was it till some changes took place, which endangered his own safety, that his mind seemed capable of admitting another thought. Then, indeed, the cowardice which accompanies cruelty broke forth, and in abject terms he implored the protection from a stranger and foreigner, which he could not from his own countrymen expect. He obtained concealment in Mr. Starinville's house from the search made for him, and eagerly, and almost

without conditions, accepted the proposal of joining three agents, already engaged by that infatuated Englishman, in hopes of promoting the revolutionary principles already, as he imagined, widely spread by Madame de Rouvier.

The first of these was a sickly and avaricious mechanic named Nicole, who, having lost some little property he had accumulated by the early excesses of the Parisian mob, and not being strong enough in the scramble to indemnify himself by seizing that of others, endeavoured, by the artifices of a subtle head, to compensate for the weakness of his hand. He became known to Mr. Starinville, through the success of an insignificant but ingenious political intrigue, and the latter, finding, as he thought, in him, just such a tool as he wanted, easily engaged his services for a sum of money, Nicole's only divinity. Unable, however, to speak English, and at once too timid and too weak to bear any share himself in the execution of the dangerous projects he showed infinite dexterity in planning, Mr. Starinville, with some trouble,

found an associate for him in the woman before described. She was a native of Havre, and had acquired, even in childhood, a knowledge of English from the company of the sailors who frequented her father's cabaret. Her brother, Pierrot Corbin, had a fishing-boat, by which he gained his living; and naturally fearless and adventurous, Marinette often had shared his labours and dangers, prompted only by the restlessness of spirit which made her prefer any peril or toil to the monotony of home. She had not only more than once visited the English coast in these excursions, but having formed there a casual acquaintance with a band of gipsies, whose wandering habits suited her own vagrant tastes, she had accompanied them for some distance into the country, and become tolerably conversant with their customs and manners.

The tumult of the Revolution, so congenial to her wild and lawless temper, had, indeed, attracted her to Paris; where, assuming the cap of liberty, and rioting in all the mad enthusiasm of

the time, she had, for some months, believed herself to have attained the supreme felicity so fallaciously promised to its deluded votaries. But at length her old habits prevailed. Tired of the streets and walls of Paris, notwithstanding the excitement which the scenes there presented, Marinette had just determined to set out with a band of returning federalists to the South of France, when Mr. Starinville's unexpected proposal offered her at once the variety she desired, together with richer means of enjoying it.

Accordingly, she not only consented willingly to go herself as Nicole's assistant on this English expedition, but undertook to procure the company of one of her former associates, whose haunts, she asserted, she could quickly find, and who readily lent the aid she asked, in the person of a shrewd and active lad, whose gipsy origin and habits, together with his intimate acquaintance with the country to which they were going, enabled the rest of the party to assume a disguise, which, without such an

auxiliary, they would have found it difficult to maintain.

Pierrot, being accordingly provided, at Mr. Starinville's expense, with a small but swift-sailing vessel, which, manned by himself and a boy, was to attend upon the orders of Nicole; the latter, with his two confederates, Marinette and the gipsy lad, were just about to embark, when they were suddenly joined by the ferocious sans culotte above-mentioned; and the whole party ere long established themselves in the vicinity of Warrington, and speedily communicated to Madame de Rouvier a packet containing the minute political instructions which Mr. Starinville had entrusted to their care. These she imparted to Leonard Claverham only the day before the accident occurred which so unexpectedly rendered him an inmate of the house.

A partizan himself of the principles they promoted, he willingly promised to give his aid to Mr. Starinville's measures: but his own disaster, Rybrent's sudden departure, and

Miss De Cruce's death, opened all at once to his view so fair a prospect of attaining an object, which had for some time been his secret but hopeless wish, that all interest in the political confusion he would otherwise gladly have raised, was quickly absorbed in his more selfish, and more exciting expectation. This was no less than to obtain, during Rybrent's absence, Clarina's youthful affections, scarcely as yet, he supposed, permanently fixed: and thus to win at once from his detested rival her hand and her rich inheritance. He had, indeed, no attachment to Clarina. If he really preferred her fair and meek beauty to the more dazzling and lively charms of her sister, that preference had been prompted, if not altogether produced, by his keen and burning desire of rivalling young De Cruce; whose passion for her was obvious, and toward whom Claverham cherished a deep hatred, which, imbibed in infancy, had, since they met in manhood, become the ruling passion of his dark mind, heightened almost to madness

by the late competition between them and its result. The fortune of either sister, indeed, was likely to be such as might attract one, to whom, like Claverham, the goods of this world alone have charms; and at first his plan reached no farther than to possess himself of Clarina and her share: while Madame de Rouvier, to whom he quickly imparted his wish, raised few objections to a project that promised, as she thought, no evil to Clarina, on whose probable constancy to Rybrent she laid little stress, though she foresaw, she said, some difficulty likely to arise from Agatha's opposition to the scheme. But wickedness is prolific in invention, and never satisfied while aught remains to wish.

Claverham, therefore, struck by Madame de Rouvier's casual hint concerning Agatha, and urged by his own blind and base covetousness, ere many more days elapsed, had devised an atrocious conspiracy against the unhappy girl, whose powerful influence with her sister, he

hoped, by these means, to remove, while he might also thus securely grasp their double inheritance.

When, however, he explained his fresh project to Madame de Rouvier, and required her assistance to complete it, she recoiled with natural horror from so vile and cruel a transaction. But she argued, remonstrated, and even implored in vain. Claverham, heated by the apparent feasibility of his scheme, was inflexible to all entreaties, and grew each day more eager to accomplish it : while the power he possessed over Madame de Rouvier, at length bore down all her opposition to his measures.

Jaqueline too, who at first had listened in sullen silence to the proposal, appeared ultimately to acquiesce in his design, and offered to lend her hand to its completion. The contrivance, indeed, wild and iniquitous as it was, was not ill arranged; while the vicinity of such agents as Mr. Starinville (for widely different purposes) had sent, offered means for its accomplishment,

which, if now neglected, might never again occur. Much consultation was accordingly carried on, sometimes at Warrington, where these wretches were frequently introduced, in the manner Geoffry had at length discovered; and sometimes through messages conveyed by Jaqueline to their well-chosen and almost impenetrable abode. Leonard, whose feigned illness greatly facilitated his plans, by continuing his presence on the spot, latterly himself joined in these nocturnal visits to the hut; and it was at last arranged, that Agatha, decoyed from the house by Jaqueline, should be seized, at whatever spot she might stop, by two of the party, who should, at some distance, follow her steps for that purpose; and who, at the signal agreed, should forcibly convey her to their retreat.

All then was to be prepared for instant departure; and their hapless victim, in the early dusk of evening, was to be hurried through by-paths well known to her conductors, towards the adjacent coast, where the swift vessel, wait-

ing their orders, would receive them immediately on board. Meantime, the alarm at Warrington might, by judicious measures, be delayed till the dinner hour should approach; when Trefarley's absence would be certain, and when the advancing darkness would greatly impede all exertions of the domestics, directed, too, as they no doubt would be, to every quarter but the right one.

For, even should the suspicions of the household lead towards the gipsies, of whose arrival in the neighbourhood they were aware, their search would be directed to the common on the right of the park; where two tents had, in fact, been pitched by these artful people, with all the usual apparatus of a vagrant life, and near which a rough and stout pony grazed. Here Robin, the gipsy lad, together with the wild female, at whose instance he had come, were usually in the day-time to be found; and here Trefarley's inquiries would probably have terminated, had he thought it advisable to ask instructions either from the servants or the

peasants in the neighbourhood, to direct his search. But understanding from the Miss Starinvilles, that this encampment was to be found close to the palings of the park, he had kept so near that boundary as to miss the tents; which, though not far, in reality, from his track, were concealed in a small hollow from his sight. By this chance alone it was that he had been tempted to suspect, and eventually to discover, their more secret abode in the deep and woody glen, where the two Frenchmen constantly remained, being unable to mix with the country people, whose language neither of them understood.

Here they were visited by Claverham and Jaqueline, who could not have ventured on such intercourse in any more open spot; and here Marinette, whose republican notions were strangely intermingled with her vagrant propensities, was indulging herself by wearing her favourite badge of liberty, and was perusing with much eagerness some intelligence her companions had received from Paris regarding

the transactions she had grown weary of witnessing, when Trefarley had suddenly surprised her: and his inquiries and threats had so alarmed the whole party, as to cause them to prepare for the immediate execution of their designs.

Jaqueline, who, for reasons of her own, disliked and watched Trefarley, and who was therefore aware that he had proceeded on foot in that direction, suspected the visit he had made; and while he was still recounting to the Miss Starinvilles his discovery, she and Claverham hastily repaired to the hut. They found their associates in guilt in some dismay, and anxious to arrange their departure, the details of which, after a conference of two or three hours, were finally arranged. Robin's activity quickly procured them the intelligence, that the casual absence of the only magistrate in the neighbourhood secured them from any effectual attempt to dislodge them on the following day, and that very period was accordingly agreed on for the final execution of their plan.

Their measures were greatly facilitated by

finding that Jaqueline had already obtained from Miss Starinville a promise of a meeting, which might only have formed a prelude to other interviews, but of which it was now determined finally to avail themselves.

But whither should they take their victim after they had reached the coast of France, and how should they safely dispose of her? This important point was now to be hastily determined. Claverham's offers were large, but so artfully arranged, as to depend totally on their effectual care to prevent the unhappy girl's escape or intercourse with her native land. This, however, it was no small difficulty to ensure. At length, the wily Nicole formed a plan, which the others readily undertook to execute. Instead of shaping their course to Havre, as was once proposed, he suggested that they should skirt the coast of France down to Marseilles. Here, he said, he possessed a female relative, who was a staunch republican, and at the head of a flourishing establishment, consisting chiefly of girls

employed in a silk manufacture. "Madame Mariceau, no doubt, would, for a handsome gratuity," he continued, "take care to employ the young aristocrat in useful occupation; while, for her own interest, she would carefully, as she might easily, prevent her escape or any communication with her friends." Claverham, after some hesitation, appeared satisfied with this plan. Robin, put ashore at Dieppe, they all agreed, might rejoin his former comrades near that place, totally ignorant of a conspiracy into which he had not been admitted, and, not even aware of the name or situation of the person who was thus suddenly to form an addition to their company, since he was entirely unacquainted with Miss Starinville's person.

When all was accomplished, the three principal agents might return, for a brief period, to England, whence they might quickly remove to Paris, with such intelligence for Mr. Starinville, their original employer, as Madame de Rouvier might think best to transmit. To her inge-

nuity, meantime, was to be left the task of satisfying Mr. Starinville with false accounts of his treacherous emissaries' proceedings, during their absence on this iniquitous, but lucrative, transaction.

Claverham now produced a sum more than sufficient to defray all their wants; and while he added to each a rich gratuity, and promised to ensure a regular stipend to Madame Mariceau, through a banker in Paris, he engaged, on their successful return, to double their present reward.

The eyes of the needy Nicole sparkled at such an acquisition of wealth, added, as it was, to the plentiful remuneration they had received from Mr. Starinville, for services, as yet, but ill-performed. Marinette, overjoyed rather at the prospect of such speedy removal from a habitation of which she had become heartily weary, than at the offer of these promised riches, busied herself (even while assisting in the consultation going on) with packing up their few possessions, and arranging all for the instant commencement of a new peregrination. The cold and sullen ruffian

alone appeared little moved, either by the proffered reward or the prospect of speedy departure. Deprived of his trade in blood, which had afforded him an excitement no weaker motives could replace; and driven by his fears to hide himself in a distant and monotonous retirement; his spirit, unexcited even by the mischievous devices he was employed to forward, had, apparently, sunk into a torpidity, from which neither the offer of gold nor the prospect of motion could awaken him.

He assented, however, to Claverham's plans, though he did not assist in the deliberations by a single word, and received his share of the reward annexed to them without any reluctance. Indeed, a sort of ghastly grin, which stole over his face at the proposal of visiting Marseilles, seemed to hint that that part of the project at least was not disagreeable to him. He probably imagined that he could, at that place, resume his murderous career, at sufficient distance from his former enemies to secure him from their knowledge or pursuit.

Claverham, who had felt some anxiety at his cold and obstinate silence, was satisfied on remarking that, when Marseilles was again mentioned, the sullen villain, for the first time, looked on the money in his hand, as if calculating the means it would bestow in furtherance of designs, it was easy from his character to surmise, and which, Claverham inwardly hoped, might quickly rid him from the burden of such a dependant.

Jaqueline now quitted the hut, and Leonard followed her; yet he lingered behind to say a few parting words to the ruffian, whom a secret sign brought after him. But, though they now stood close together beneath the large elm, through whose branches the rising moon was flinging an uncertain light, Claverham for some seconds did not speak. The pale beam which alone lit his face was every instant crossed by the moving shadow of the boughs. The expression of his countenance could not, therefore, be traced, but its hue was evidently of a death-like white, while, in a tone of forced carelessness,

he at length whispered, "These soft-brained comrades of ours, Thiebaut, have arranged a very intricate and ingenious plan! Would it not be better, think you, that the girl should fall out of the boat some dark night?" A heavy purse here met the miscreant's hand, and a stare of pleasure flashed in the moonlight from his broad eyes, as a task so congenial seemed committed to him. "*Oui, oui, citoyen!*" he chuckled in a whisper, as he clenched both the purse and the hand which offered it in his grasp. Claverham would have muttered a few words about a "farther donation," but the syllables seemed to cling to his parched lips, and turning hastily, he followed, but avoided joining, Jaqueline. Both pursued, in silence, the narrow and rugged path, and at length reached the house; while the ruffian they had left, re-entering his den, with some seeming interest now took share in the preparations for departure.

Claverham, when in his own apartment, soon regained the composure, of which, for a few mo-

ments, remorse had deprived him; and by the time he joined the Miss Starinvilles that evening, the apparently speedy success which seemed likely to crown his nefarious plan, had so elevated his spirits, and roused his confidence, that no mark of relenting appeared. Yet, villain as he was, he could not meet the eyes of his unsuspicious and innocent victim; and, notwithstanding the natural hardness of his heart and temper, the occasional hasty glance he now and then threw upon her, betrayed a peculiarity of feeling which, as we have seen, poor Agatha most grievously misinterpreted.

CHAPTER XII.

SHE was now but too fatally undeceived, and as her two rude conductors hurried her up the steep and rugged path which led to their abode with a strength that made resistance vain, her extreme paleness, and the mechanical action with which her limbs seemed to obey the outward force employed, formed a striking and painful contrast to the robust and vigorous steps and eager gestures of her companions.

These repeatedly urged her to quicken her pace. "Much time," the female murmured, "had already been lost by their delay at the stream, and every moment was precious." Yet, when they had brought their victim near the last turn in the narrow track from which the

hut would immediately become visible, they stopped, as if by mutual consent; while the man still kept his strong grasp on Agatha's arm, the woman, loosening her hold, was about, it seemed, to leave them: but Miss Starinville, seizing the hand from which she had before recoiled with terror, clung to it with an eagerness that appeared at once to surprise and to touch her conductress, who said hastily,

"Well; I will stay! Thiebaut, do you go and see if all is right!" These latter words were spoken in French, and the ruffian hastened forwards. Left alone with this female, who had thus, for an instant, appeared susceptible of pity, the unfortunate Agatha again, with wild entreaties, endeavoured to obtain her escape. But she implored mercy in vain from her rough companion, nor, indeed, had she much time for the attempt. A few minutes only had elapsed, when the grim visage of Thiebaut glared downwards on them, and the word "Avancez!" in his harsh voice, at once broke upon Agatha's entreaties, and set the female to

whom they were addressed in motion. Again, therefore, was Miss Starinville hurried forwards, and, turning the angle at which she had been stopped, she suddenly saw above her the hut with its large tree in front, as it had been described to her by Trefarley.

The sickness of despair came upon her heart as she beheld it. But she had no time for more than one hasty glance of recognition. Impelled forcibly onward by her two conductors, she almost immediately reached and entered the dark abode.

She looked wildly and anxiously round it, almost hoping that she should find Jaqueline, whose presence, accomplice as she was in this vile plot, she felt she should prefer to that of the two wretches in whose power she was left. But though the gloom of the rude chamber into which she was thus introduced was too deep to be pierced by the first hurried glance she threw around it, a second survey convinced her that no one was there, and she sunk on a seat near the small window to which her leaders

conducted her, in utter exhaustion. But Marinette now produced wine and food, and though it was with difficulty she forced her prisoner to partake of either, she at length prevailed, and Agatha's colour and strength being restored, her two companions retired, and closed the door. Though revived by the refreshment she had received, Agatha still sat for some seconds in a state resembling stupefaction. Suddenly, however, starting up, she looked again wildly round the apartment, in hopes of discovering some outlet besides the door, (on the outside of which she believed her guards were still stationed,) by which she might escape.

But the window was too small to admit of such an attempt, and no other aperture could be seen. At the extreme end of the apartment two rough frames were standing, which by their size and shape seemed intended for places of repose. But they were now stripped of all covering, and with the addition of a rude kind of table, and the seat on which she again sunk, formed the only furniture of this lonely abode. A few

packages on the floor, bound tightly up, and evidently ready for removal, were the only tokens of any other articles having been possessed by its inhabitants; and as Agatha gazed on these signs of approaching departure, and remembered Jaqueline's mysterious and treacherous warnings, her spirit sunk within her, and she lifted her eyes, from which the tears now streamed, to that Heaven, from whose immediate interposition alone she felt she could look for aid.

From these thoughts the opening of the door suddenly roused her, and she looked in terror towards it, expecting the entrance of her two remorseless guides to hurry her instantly away. But the figure she saw there had no resemblance to the persons she expected. It was that of a young man, whose attitude and manner plainly expressed admiration, sympathy, and respect; and Agatha gazed on the stranger with bewildered astonishment. The gloom of the hut made it difficult accurately to trace his features, even had her spirit been calm enough

to allow of such observation, but there was sufficient light to show her that this new intruder was extremely handsome. His uncovered and nobly formed head, was richly adorned with dark locks, which parting over a high and open forehead, left his eyes, brilliant even in darkness, to their free and animated play. In the wild and changeful expression of these eyes, and in the conflicting shades which occasionally clouded that lofty brow, a more composed spectator, aided by better light than poor Agatha possessed, might, indeed, have traced the unbridled and stormy spirit which ruled within. But as he now advanced, his slight and graceful figure, and the half pitying, and half rejoicing smile which, as he gazed upon her, lighted up his striking face, were all that Agatha marked in the form thus suddenly presented to her sight.

She started up, while joyful hopes of a deliverer mingled themselves with her surprise at the appearance of this stranger. But a chilling recollection of the mysterious friend alluded to

by the treacherous Jaqueline darted across her thoughts, and oppressed and alarmed she sunk again upon her seat. The stranger, who had for a moment paused at his entrance, now fled towards her, and while he dropped one knee to the ground at her feet, he said in a voice of subdued agitation,

"Miss Starinville, I grieve to use such violence to you, but—"

The tone, still more the articulation, struck upon Agatha's startled ear; she gazed for a moment wildly but piercingly on the beautiful face, which now so near her was become more visible, and with a shriek of astonishment and terror she exclaimed,—"Jaqueline!"

"Call me no more by that detestable name, I conjure you!" cried the youth, whose speaking visage told the disgust he felt at the appellation. "I consented, indeed, under the influence of a powerful but transient infatuation, to assume a disguise to which no perils could have made me stoop—but I should long since have thrown off a constraint so degrading—so

insupportable, but for the chance, the only chance it afforded me, of remaining near one whom I beheld but to adore, to whose service and protection I would willingly have sacrificed a life, which a propitious chance seems now—"

But the increasing vehemence of the stranger's tone, and the triumphant expression of his lofty features, were suddenly checked by the total paleness which had overspread the unhappy Agatha's face, and the cold dead stillness which had succeeded her exclamation of amazement.

Yet, though the shock of a discovery so unexpectedly made had indeed been appalling, it seemed as if the very extremity of her situation brought her fresh strength; and the pause in the stranger's discourse, now aiding the internal struggle by which she was gathering every faculty to support her in this trying emergency, it was at length, with something resembling calmness, that she unclosed her half shut eyes, and fixing them on the face which was still gaz-

ing at her with intense anxiety, she said in a low but tolerably firm voice,

"I know not who you are—but as a man—it would seem a gentleman; and above all, as a christian—I appeal to you, in the name of Heaven, not to partake in a plot which you have yourself described as the device of a wicked and hateful wretch, against one who has done him no wrong; one for whom you profess such regard—" (a deep and burning colour took place of the livid hue before on Agatha's cheek, and her voice faultered, but in another instant she proceeded)—"and one, whose friendless and perilous situation should surely call for protection rather than injury! Help me to return, I implore you, to my home! Oh, let me lose no time in escaping!" she exclaimed with increasing eagerness, while she sprung from her seat, "and you will secure my gratitude for ever!"

The young man rose from the ground as she spoke. A gratified smile had crossed his

haughty countenance as he had seen her colour heighten, yet his attitude, as he now placed himself between her and the door, showed him more ready to retard than to aid her escape. Miss Starinville, stopped by his extended arm, and suddenly recollecting that, changed as his form now was, it was himself who had given her over to the very wretches from whom she was thus imploring him to deliver her, again sunk on her seat in despair.

The stranger failed not to avail himself of the opportunity her silence afforded. In hurried words, mixed with expressions of ardent admiration and attachment, he explained his intention and purposes, and hinted at his hopes. He, as a stranger and a foreigner, only known too in a disguise, which he blushed to have so long worn, could not, he said, offer her even temporary aid, much less insure her permanent protection, from the wiles of a man like Claverham; whose power, it was plain, he was willing to magnify. It was therefore by appearing to

countenance this plot, he affirmed, that he had alone been able to devise means for securing a safety and happiness so much dearer to him than his own. He had accordingly hastened, by several hours, the execution of Claverham's well-concerted and nefarious plan; but he had secured the sordid services of the very villains who were to complete it; and instead of carrying her to banishment—servitude—(and he shuddered with unfeigned horror as he added in a lower voice), probably to a violent death, he proposed to convey her immediately to Paris, where, joining her father, and under his protection, she might defy all farther danger from Claverham, and might listen to vows, the fervour of which could be but equalled by their sincerity; and might, ultimately with Mr. Starinville's sanction, accept of the services of a life devoted to her.

To all this, poured forth with an ardent eloquence which betrayed a character both impassioned and unprincipled, Agatha listened

with increasing terror; while as he concluded, this wild and impetuous young man again threw himself at her feet, exclaiming,

"The time presses, dearest Miss Starinville! yes every instant is of unspeakable importance! Will you pardon the friendly violence which has been used, and will you prepare for the immediate flight now necessary?"

"No, no!" cried Agatha with a stifled cry of agony; and making a faint effort to rise, she clasped her hands together, and almost inarticulately sobbed out, "Have pity, I implore you! Oh, have pity upon me!"

The young man, in evident agitation, was about to reply, while he seized her hand as if to prevent her from rising, when, as she lifted her eyes suddenly to the door, she uttered a piercing shriek. The stranger started to his feet, and turning round, beheld Leonard Claverham standing there. The scorn on his lip, and the fury on his brow, were but faintly traced, compared with the deep hatred which glared through his dark and malignant eye, as he

fixed it alternately upon Agatha and her admirer.

All three stood silent; but while the two latter were speechless from astonishment and agitation, Claverham seemed to delay his words only for the pleasure of contemplating his victim, as the tiger eyes his prey before he springs.

"I have interrupted you it seems, Chevalier Dugavet!" at last he said, in a cold and sarcastic tone; "I had some suspicion that you might be here; though I deemed you liked your yellow robe too well to part with it. Truly, it suits your stripling form better than that masculine garb!"

"Leonard Claverham!" cried Dugavet, in a voice trembling with passion, "I am armed," (and he grasped the hilt of a short dagger by his side,) "and you are not—I shall therefore let your insult pass. But I now, before you, openly avow that I adore this lovely girl, against whose peace you have so cruelly been plotting. I would forcibly, ere this, have snatched her from your power, but for my pre-

carious situation in your country as a foreigner —and in such degrading disguise. I therefore stooped to use art like your own—*that*, it seems, has failed—and I now tell you plainly that I am resolved on my purpose! Every thing is arranged, your wicked tools have sold themselves to me, as they did before to you. Swear then on this spot—and swear solemnly, to let me pursue my designs in peace, or take that rapier yonder," (and as he spoke he pointed to a weapon, considerably longer than his own, hanging on the wall,) "and let force decide between us!"

A cold sneer was Claverham's only answer to this challenge, while he turned towards the door, as if to summon the assistance his composure seemed to denote he expected. But the fiery Dugavet, springing towards him, arrested him by seizing his arm.

"Stop!" he exclaimed, in a haughty and commanding tone. "Think not to leave this hut till you have either made the promise I

require, or refused it at the peril of deadly strife! Speak—or defend yourself!"

The fire which flashed from Dugavet's brilliant eye, and the burning colour which rose to his cheek, showed that these were no vain words, while his lofty and animated bearing, as well as his active, though slender, form, bespoke him no contemptible antagonist. Yet was there a tincture of scorn in the malicious glance which Claverham fixed on him, as he muttered in rep :—

"Fool, as well as traitor! Do you imagine I mean to contend for a point that is already in my power?" Dugavet's cheek grew white; he laid his hand on his dagger, but suddenly recollecting himself, turned and flew to the wall, whence his vehement passion scarcely allowed him to disengage the weapon hanging there; while Agatha, perceiving the approaching conflict, and overwhelmed by all she had already suffered, uttered a faint scream, as she endeavoured to rise from her seat, and instantly sunk on it again in a swoon. But Dugavet neither

heard her shriek nor saw her fall. While he was tearing with violence from the wall the sword, which a cooler hand might with ease have detached, Claverham drew a pistol from his breast, and levelling it with cowardly and murderous aim against the unguarded head thus turned away, he fired with sure precision. The bullet entered its mark, and the rash and unfortunate Dugavet, driven against the wall, and dashed suddenly round by the violence of the stroke, in another instant lay extended and bleeding on the ground. Claverham watched the effect of his shot, and smiled at its success. He then turned to Agatha, but her pale face drooping against the chair which alone had prevented her from sinking to the earth, seemed to offer only another image of death, and the murderer, averting his eyes, fixed them again on Dugavet's corpse, as if the spectacle of his own completed deed were the less embarrassing of the two. He advanced to the body, and touched it with his foot to ascertain if any life remained. But the wild and ungoverned spirit had fled to its

account: and the head so lately borne aloft in proud and confident defiance, now rested motionless on the ground, unconscious of the foot that spurned it, while its thick and glossy curls were deeply soaked in the blood which already formed a pool beneath.

"Fool that I was!" muttered Claverham as he again turned towards the door, "not to have suspected sooner what was going on!" He quickened his step, but the entrance was darkened by the stout figure of Thiebaut, who hastily exclaimed,

"Was that a pistol, Chevalier? I thought you were differently engaged!" The ruffian started as he now perceived it was Claverham he addressed; but the latter, pretending not to hear his question, exclaimed in a hurried tone;

"There is no time to be lost, Thiebaut;" throw a cloak over the girl there, and take her off! the motion will bring her to her senses. Is the horse ready? Waste not an instant, but be off! Where is Marinette?"

"Here!" cried the female, who had already entered the hut; Thiebaut having advanced to collect the bundles on the floor, "But what," she added, "is all this?" At that moment Thiebaut, stumbling over the body of Dugavet, made an exclamation, to which Claverham hastily answered,

"Yes; that is our proud Chevalier! I found him here courting that girl, and I suppose they had concerted it between them. But I had some suspicion all was not right, so I came, it seems, just in time. He *would* fight—and I shot him through the head, as you may see. You must put him out of the way as fast as you can, and be off instantly. The search will soon begin after you! It is past one now," he added, looking on his watch, "and I must return to the house as secretly as I came!"

Marinette, rough as she was, could not repress an ejaculation of pity for the fate of the handsome and spirited Dugavet, who thus lay dead before her. But Thiebaut, glad to escape so easily from the detection of his share in a

transaction, (the reward for which was already in his pocket) and animated by the very sight of blood, exclaimed with brutal gaiety, "So then! the stripling has really tried the difference between being murdered in pretence and in earnest! It 's not fair, though, to have defrauded me twice of my job! I gave it up to him before, because I had plenty else on my hands, and had no objection, besides, to defraud that villain Barlot. But now, I actually wanted practice! But come, Marinette, get the girl ready! We shall soon overtake Nicole; the limping wretch walks so slowly!"

"What will you do with the body here?" asked Leonard, in some perplexity.

"Why leave it just as it is," replied the ruffian coolly. "He may as well lie warm in the hut as out of it. We have no tools to dig a hole, if we had time; and your paltry brook here would not cover a dog! They can but say we have killed him, and as he is no countryman of their's, who will care? Our safety, as it is, must depend on our legs, so we shall be

no worse. So now, get back to the house, Citizen, and keep all quiet there as long as you can! Our vessel lies snug in the creek, and we shall be down, and on board, directly. So once more, I say, let us be off!"

The flush of exultation on Claverham's cheek had sunk, and it was now frightfully pale. He avoided even once turning his eyes towards Agatha, about whom Marinette had busied herself, but casting a hurried glance again on Dugavet's corpse, he abruptly quitted the hut.

His self-possession, however, as well as his determination, seemed to revive as he breathed the open air, for he returned to the door. There Thiebaut advanced to meet him; and Leonard directing a glance towards the corner, in which Agatha, though not within his sight, was placed, in a low and significant tone uttered the word "Remember!" and again turning, strode hastily away.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE sun was shining brilliantly, and the birds, delighted with the unusual radiance, were, notwithstanding the cold and biting air, greeting it with merry carols. But Claverham owned no corresponding feeling of joy. He posted onwards with long and stealthy steps, looking frequently and anxiously round, and choosing the thickest and most entangled paths; while, if but a sear leaf fell across his way, or dropped lightly on his head, he started aside as if the hand of Justice had suddenly barred his path. No impediment, however, in reality, crossed his guilty steps, nor did human eye witness his retreat from the scene of murder to the solitude of his own chamber. He had locked this apartment on leaving it, in order the

better to conceal his absence; and now, hastily and silently admitting himself, he again turned the key, and threw himself in a chair. All remained in the room as he had quitted it; but what a change was his! Guilty as he had before been, the sport of every dark and dangerous passion, the crime of murder had not, till now, actually stained his hands, though the design of it had spotted his soul. Still there was a step between the intention and the actual commission of such a deed, which induced him to turn, as for relief, from the vivid image of the young Dugavet's warm and bloody corpse, which seemed yet lying at his feet, to meditate on the probable success of the rest of his plan, accompanied as it was to be by the perpetration of a similar crime. Fear of detection, and dread, not ill-founded, of treachery in his accomplices, mingled, however, with such increasing force in his cogitations, that there were moments in which, hiding his face in his hands, and subdued by alarm, he heartily wished he had never embarked, and with such confederates, in a de-

sign so perilous. He had plainly discovered both by Dugavet's own open assertion, and from Thiebaut's first few words, that the former had successfully tampered with agents he had believed to have secured to himself. Having, however, so speedily despatched this formidable and unexpected antagonist, he had, in the hurry of the moment, judged it better policy to conceal from his treacherous accomplices his knowledge of their falsehood; and the hasty zeal displayed by both Thiebaut and Marinette to forward the original plan, as soon as they had perceived Dugavet's death, proved that he had judged wisely. Yet, with this new proof of a duplicity, which it was plain was at the service of the highest bidder, Claverham now could not but shudder, while he felt he was completely in their power.

He endeavoured strenuously, however, to shake off these fears, as he rose and paced the room, muttering to himself,—

"They dare not—they have no interest to betray me now! They are alarmed for their

own safety too, and I may trust to that. Besides, they have not far to go; once embarked, and my anxieties will all be over!" A long pause ensued, and for some moments he stood still, his face dark with contending passions. He then walked to the window. The sun was still brightly dazzling, though thick and pillared clouds were rising in the west. "This fine weather is very unlucky," he murmured, "if it would snow now, it would lessen the chance of their being met, as well as baffle pursuit!" He continued for some time to watch the clouds, which rolling forwards at first in one black mass, at last began to rear a host of glittering summits against the sun, whose orb they threatened speedily to shroud. Claverham gathered security from their advance: and now more at ease concerning an escape, which, it was evident, would soon be favoured by a snow-storm, his thoughts once more reverted to Dugavet.

This unfortunate young man, high-spirited, ardent, and enthusiastic, had possessed talents

and qualities which, under better auspices, and controlled by reason and religion, might have produced an exalted character. Born, however, of distinguished but vicious parents, and bred up amidst all the scepticism and immorality so prevalent at that period in France, his passions had learnt to obey no law but his will, and that will was little more than a caprice, which scarcely consulted, much less obeyed, the dictates of an understanding naturally fine, though misused and perverted.

Drawn from the political excesses into which he had vehemently plunged, by a sudden passion for the fascinating Victorine de Rouvier, which soon, in its violence, overwhelmed every other sentiment, he was prevailed on by her tears and entreaties to assume a disguise which, while it secured him from the sanguinary pursuit of his powerful enemy Barlot, also offered the attraction of remaining with the object of his attachment. This latter motive proved more forcible than the former would have been to his wild and fearless spirit. He therefore met, and

concerted with the ruffian Thiebaut, whom he knew to be employed by Barlot, but over whom he had himself some influence, the measures whereby that wily and cruel demagogue had been deceived into a belief of his death; and assuming the name and peculiar dress of a former faithful attendant of Madame de Rouvier, he proceeded with her to England.

Here, a few days after his arrival, he was met and recognized by Leonard Claverham, with whom he had, the preceding year, spent two months in France in the familiar intercourse which a similarity in pursuits, though not of character, produced.

The motive for his strange disguise was quickly explained, and the two young men frequently met in the extensive grounds of Warrington, Claverham's society forming some relief to Dugavet from the constraint of a situation, irksome enough to have become speedily insupportable to a spirit much less ungovernable than his. He, undoubtedly, would very quickly have thrown off a mask

he detested, and at once left a country he had thus disgracefully visited, and a mistress, for whom his infatuation had already ceased, but for a deep and growing admiration of Agatha Starinville, with whose beauty he was greatly struck, and for whose manners and character he gradually conceived a romantic attachment. Unaccustomed to the charm which innocence and virtue confer on female society, his passion for this young Englishwoman grew upon him with a force as novel as it was overpowering. It is true, his opportunities of seeing her were but limited, and his fear of arousing the suspicion of Madame de Rouvier, prevented him from openly seeking to increase them.

Still he beheld her sufficiently often to nourish and increase an affection, which, had he been under different circumstances, might perhaps have thrown a salutary influence over the whole of his future life. As it was, this feeling, deeper and better founded than the stormy passion which had brought him under Madame

de Rouvier's controul, was proportionably calmer; and while he could not resolve to leave the spot which contained the object of his admiration, he had yet only formed the reasonable project of returning to France, and using there every imaginable means to induce Mr. Starinville to accept as a son-in-law, a man whose nation and principles, he was gladly aware, would only plead in his favour.

He could not, indeed, but fear that his present disguise, and the purpose for which it had been assumed, might prove a serious obstacle to his hopes with Agatha herself: but his own lax ideas and principles made him imagine that this might prove no insuperable difficulty, and day after day found him devising plans, the execution of which, however, as it must lead him from Warrington, was still delayed.

Meantime, though fearful of exciting Madame de Rouvier's suspicions, and afraid of trusting his voice in the Miss Starinvilles' presence in more than whispered tones, he yet heard and beheld Agatha with increasing ad-

miration, while he watched with keen scrutiny the conduct of those around her. Rybrent de Cruce's evident attachment to Clarina, and Claverham's secret avowal to him of designs in the same quarter, soon relieved him from all anxiety on their account; but an irritable jealousy awakened in him suspicions of Trefarley, which occasionally broke out in a seeming animosity towards him, that both surprised and perplexed Madame de Rouvier.

More cautious towards Miss Starinville herself, his sentiments regarding her remained entirely unsuspected, till his uneasiness at her departure with Clarina for Esterfield, his evident dejection during her absence, and the inquiries he could not refrain from making, together with his joy at the return of the two sisters, awakened a crowd of doubts in Madame de Rouvier's mind, and she reproached him with much violence, and many tears. Alarmed, but not touched by her remonstrances, he for some time carefully refrained from seeing the Miss Starinvilles, and

listened to the plans which Claverham now began to divulge, with a silence and assent which seemed entirely to lull Madame de Rouvier's fears. She, though thus incensed against the innocent Agatha, for reasons of which Claverham had not the slightest suspicion, was yet seriously reluctant at first to go the frightful lengths he proposed against her safety: but she was overborne by Leonard's violence, who pressed his point (in utter ignorance of the state of Dugavet's feelings,) with a vehemence heightened to authority by the hold he had long possessed over both by his knowledge of their secret. While, therefore, Madame de Rouvier submissively yielded to his plans, Dugavet soon listened to the scheme with far deeper interest than he thought fit to display. To act as the champion and deliverer of the unfortunate girl, whose peace was thus menaced—to carry her himself in safety and freedom to her father, would, he imagined, triumphantly outweigh the disgrace which he could not but feel

he had incurred by his present unworthy disguise.

In this detestable garb, he would not indeed explain his real motives to Miss Starinville, but he resolved to assume his own form before their departure, and he trusted to the exigency of the moment to excuse any force which might have been, or still should be, necessary to convey her from a peril, of which he suspected the full extent, though Claverham believed him wholly ignorant of any secret instructions to the savage Thiebaut. Over this wretch, monster as he was, Dugavet, however, still possessed much of the influence which his better education, his lofty manners, and his bold and unshrinking bravery, had given him, when first, amid the disunion of ranks in Paris, they had met, and become associates. Still, without a double bribe, (which the new plans now floating in that ruffian's brain made very acceptable,) it is probable Thiebaut might not have consented to change

employers; though the readiness with which, after Dugavet's fall, he returned without a comment to Claverham's original design, proved that his inclinations were, at least, nicely balanced between them.

It was not so with Marinette. Won by the noble manners of Dugavet, of whose disguise she was aware, she had become truly interested in his cause, and might have displayed a displeasure and regret at his untimely fate, which would have drawn on her the reproach and ridicule of her associates, had she not seized the opportunity of concealing her real feelings, by occupying herself with the fainting Agatha, whose situation indeed demanded every succour she could give. The ferocious Thiebaut, meanwhile, exulted in the belief that Claverham was totally ignorant both of his and Marinette's treachery, and imagined her silence only proceeded from prudence, like his own.

Leonard himself had, in fact, been scarcely sufficiently master of his thoughts at the moment, to scan their appearance minutely. He

had contracted for Dugavet, while in France, as much friendship as his nature was capable of entertaining. It is true, that awed by his commanding spirit, and by the impetuosity of a temper as much more vehement, as it was more noble, than his own, there was a mixture of restraint and fear occasionally in their intercourse, on Claverham's side, which had proved to his dastardly mind no small alloy. But the humiliating circumstances under which he had met Dugavet in England, had greatly removed this sensation; and the knowledge of his guilty secret, which alone, as Leonard believed, rendered his formerly haughty companion so willing an agent in his plans, seemed still farther to confirm a superiority so recently attained. Yet were there still moments in which Claverham's base soul shrunk instinctively before Dugavet's fiery spirit; and even while the latter appeared but to obey the suggestions he received, he frequently betrayed a contempt for his employer, which gradually inspired corresponding feelings of hatred in Claverham's breast.

Believing him, however, to be still engrossed by Madame de Rouvier, no suspicion whatever of Dugavet's sentiments towards Agatha, had crossed Leonard's mind, nor had he entertained any design against his life, till being startled that morning by a peevish expression uttered by Madame de Rouvier, which betrayed some jealousy of the arrangement made, that Jaqueline should betray Miss Starinville to her fate, he suddenly left the room to ruminate on the idea thus casually suggested. Many trivial circumstances, before unheeded, now rushed on his mind to confirm this notion; and on eagerly seeking for Dugavet, from whose manner and countenance he hoped to gather enough either to corroborate or destroy a suspicion so alarming, his doubt was changed to certainty, by discovering, that though it was several hours before the time appointed by himself and his confederates, the Chevalier was already gone, and that Agatha was likewise absent.

It was then that, his hatred amounting to fury, Claverham, preserving strict silence on the dis-

covery he had made, retired to his room, where he procured and hid in his breast the pistol, of which he speedily made such cowardly use; and whence he soon afterwards cautiously issued, locking the door after him to conceal his absence.

He hurried to the well-known place of rendezvous, where the sight of the young and handsome Dugavet in his own dress, and kneeling at Agatha's feet, so goaded his malignant feelings, that he refrained only from committing the act to which his inclination even more than his fancied necessity now prompted him, till the moment offered for doing it in safety. This opportunity was soon afforded him by the furious but unsuspecting Dugavet; and he beheld his enemy (so lately styled his friend,) at his feet, with an exultation which, though on his return to his solitary chamber it had been dashed with something like remorse, yet seemed now to rise even to triumph, as the darkening horizon became every moment heavier with snow, some flakes of which already crossing his win-

dow, relieved him from the fear of detection, which had alone produced his momentary regret.

"The proud Frenchman has got his due!" he mused with increasing satisfaction. "He, at least, will cross my path no more!—and this snow storm, how opportune it is! They must already have reached the shore, or if not, they will now proceed for their own sakes as fast as they can; while this snow will efface every track!"

Well pleased at the time and distance gained by the fugitives, without as yet any token of alarm in the house, he now resolved to seek Madame de Rouvier. From her, he was aware, he must carefully conceal that he had any knowledge, still more that he had been the author, of the catastrophe which must shortly come to light. He therefore prepared himself to make use of her jealousy, for which he perceived she had had good cause; and by rousing her anger, to avert the chance of her betraying the whole conspiracy by unguarded lamentations.

She was not in her apartment, and he proceeded to the library, at a window of which he found her standing; watching, with a dubious expression of countenance, the black and heavy atmosphere which had succeeded the brilliant sunshine of the morning; and the occasional flakes of snow, which falling slowly, seemed but the sullen harbingers of the thickening host behind.

As Claverham entered she turned and exclaimed, "I thought this unlucky weather must have totally deranged our plans, for this is but little beyond the time they were to have commenced, and I imagined Miss Starinville could hardly have been so infatuated with her new friend, as to have consented to walk out now! but I find they are already gone! Dugavet told me, indeed, that he was going early to the hut this morning, to arrange something which had been forgotten; and I have not seen him since breakfast. But I went to the drawing-room just now, and finding no one there, I looked into the Miss Starinvilles' apartment;

and Clarina, who seemed scarcely inclined to raise her eyes from her paper (I suppose she was writing to young De Cruce), told me her sister, she believed, was walking." She looked again at the window, as she added, "this snow, I think, must hasten Dugavet's proceedings, and we may expect him back soon!"

"He will linger with his pretty friend as long as he can, you may be sure," replied Claverham, whose design of awakening Madame de Rouvier's jealousy was not softened by her thoughtless, or perhaps malicious description of Clarina's employment. "I have often observed of late," he continued, "how much he admires her!"

Shocked at hearing a suspicion thus openly expressed, which she had herself betrayed to Dugavet alone, and which his recent demeanour had indeed greatly lulled, Madame de Rouvier remained silent; and both she and Claverham continued for some time, at separate windows, to watch the now thickly falling snow. Leonard, however, at length broke the pause;

and while he showed much kindness in his voice and manner, he artfully began to suggest some fear lest Dugavet, won by Agatha's beauty and distress, should prove traitor to them both.

Madame de Rouvier affected to treat this supposition with contempt, but her flushed cheek and angry brow belied her words, and she was increasing in vehemence, while Claverham was soothing her wrath, and gradually gaining her confidence, when Clarina suddenly entered the apartment.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WHERE is my sister, Madame de Rouvier?" exclaimed Clarina, with an eagerness which prevented her from remarking the conference she disturbed, and the somewhat guilty look which her sudden question awakened. Madame de Rouvier, however, with quickly resumed self-possession, pleaded ignorance, and Clarina, in evident distress, resumed—"You see how it snows, and the day is beginning to decline; and yet I cannot find her in the house, though it is surely impossible she can be walking still—at this hour and in this weather! Have you not seen her?"

"No," replied Madame de Rouvier, while Claverham, with affected concern, echoed the

negative. "When did she go?" inquired Madame de Rouvier.

"She went into the garden immediately after breakfast," cried Clarina, whose cheek grew pale with alarm, "and I have not seen her since!"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Madame de Rouvier, in real surprise and displeasure, "is that possible!" As she spoke thus, the evident expression of consternation in her face so heightened Clarina's terror, that bursting into tears, she entreated Claverham to aid in searching the gardens, and was even running from the room to assist herself in the quest, when Leonard gently detained her, conjuring her to remain with Madame de Rouvier, while he undertook a search, in which, he said, if not quickly successful, he would call for Geoffry's assistance. Clarina, in her alarm, remarked not the inconsistency of such an offer with the feebleness he had so lately professed, but, grateful for his service, and for the kindness which seemed to take such part in her anxiety, she warmly thanked him, and yielding to his

entreaties, remained in a state of uneasiness and fear, which became every moment more acute. During his absence she searched every room again, and returned to the library only to gaze from the window on the earth now white with snow, which fell thicker as the daylight decreased. Her suspense now rose to agony, and she was on the point of rushing from the house, while she rung the bell hastily to despatch fresh messengers, when Claverham returned.

His hat was white with snow, and his air expressed deep commiseration, while he assured her that he had traced every walk in the garden, and searched the shrubberies in vain. He now proposed to send Mr. Drywinkle down the avenue, while he would himself take the road behind the house, and despatch Joe, and his own servant, in two other directions. Clarina listened to these suggestions with shuddering horror. The day was rapidly closing, and her sister, it was plain, was not even near the house!

The alarm was now quickly spread among

the servants, and a scene of search ensued, which began in fear, and ended almost in distraction. Such indeed was Geoffry's anxiety and terror, that but for Mrs. Rustleton he would have rushed from the house without great-coat, or even hat, to brave weather from which the very animals shrank. But the prudent housekeeper held by main force his arm, while she bade Joe fetch his accoutrements, and by this delay he heard Claverham suggest the avenue, as the most likely road for Miss Starinville to have taken. With this supposition his own judgment concurred, and accordingly, he had no sooner broken away from Mrs. Rustleton's friendly precautions, than he darted off that way, over the now whitened ground, with incredible activity.

Claverham himself, having seen Joe and Stephen depart in equally false directions, took the road towards the common, as he had proposed, and absorbed in his own reflections, reached the gate above the wood, where he remained for some time, scarcely heeding either the

increasing darkness or the cold, so engrossed was he in calculating the certain success of his guilty plot.

"Thiebaut and Marinette," at length he muttered, "are as hardy as bears! They would not heed this weather, and are by this time at sea, no doubt!" Callous as he was, a sensation almost like pity touched his heart, as the thought of the young and helpless girl, exposed to the inclemency of such a night, rose before him: but he quickly shook it off, and began to retrace his steps down the hill. It was not without difficulty, so rapidly had the snow increased, that he at length reached the house, where his whole appearance conveyed to the unhappy Clarina such a dismal picture of her sister's probable situation, that her wild and eager inquiries were cut short by a torrent of tears. Stephen and Joe, it appeared, had already returned, declaring that they could go no farther on the respective roads they had taken, and affirming that search was as useless as impossible, since they could dis-

tinguish nothing a yard before them in the present darkness.

Mrs. Rustleton was alone in the drawing-room with Clarina, and seemed won by Claverham's exertions to relent in her usual ill-will towards him. "Madam Rover, and Mademoiselle Jaqueline," she said, "she supposed were up-stairs, and to be sure did not seem to concern themselves much about poor Miss Starinville. She believed, after all, that it was Mr. Drywinkle who would bring her back; but it was so cold and dark, no wonder if she walked very slow; and that was the reason, perhaps, why he staid out so much longer than the rest."

Clarina's streaming eyes beamed with hope at this suggestion, which, however, again sunk to despondency, as at that moment Geoffry entered the room alone.

His figure was even more deplorable than that of Leonard: but having had time, during his unsuccessful search, to consider the matter more deeply, he had no sooner ascertained that Miss Starinville had not yet been found, than,

anxious not to increase Clarina's alarm, he drew Claverham aside, and hurriedly exclaimed, that as he was convinced his young mistress would never have walked so far, she must have been forcibly conveyed away; and that he could suspect no one of such a deed but the gipsies, who had been for some time in the neighbourhood. He therefore proposed, instantly, to search their tents, with such force as he could muster. Leonard, with alacrity, joined in this suggestion, and the steward, pleased with his ready acquiescence and offered aid, despatched Joe for some lanthorns, while he informed Clarina merely that they were about to continue their search with lights.

Claverham seized a moment of delay to seek Madame de Rouvier. He found her in her apartment shedding tears of rage and grief. "It was evident," she said, "that Dugavet had himself fled with Agatha, and probably it was a concerted plan between them. But he should find, she could revenge herself!" In this state Claverham easily obtained from her a

promise to use her utmost discretion in averting suspicion both from herself and him; and with this assurance, he hurried from her chamber, which, however, she professed she was at present unable to leave. He joined Geoffry in the hall, and, with the addition of Joe and Stephen, the party sallied forth. The result of this expedition was such as might be foreseen. Geoffry's chagrin and despair at finding the tents (round which, by his direction, the party crept with all the silence and caution of an ambush of Indians,) deserted and empty, mocked every power of expression. The very fact, however, of their being thus abandoned, betrayed a hasty flight, which might have converted suspicions less strong than his to certainty.

But which way were the fugitives gone? No trace in the snow (except their own footsteps, which they now carefully examined,) appeared to give an answer to this question; and while the ground without baffled all their inquiries, the tents within, small, dark, and empty, offered nothing to satisfy even the most awak-

ened curiosity. Again, therefore, but with spirits depressed and fatigued limbs, cold, wet, and silent, the party returned to the house, where Clarina had passed the period of their absence in all the wretched alternations of suspence.

Every noise, however slight, at window or door, had drawn her towards it with a rush of hope, which had sickened at each disappointment into colder and colder despair; and when, at the expiration of above two hours, the party returned, and she saw them enter, covered with snow, and without her sister, she neither by word nor token made any inquiry, but pale and speechless stood the motionless image of woe. The words of false condolence died away on Claverham's lip as he beheld her mute and touching grief; and he turned from a sight which, obdurate as he was, awakened in him a sensation like remorse. But Geoffry's honest compassion rather excited than checked his loquacity; and he addressed his disconsolate mistress with a torrent of kind but mistaken efforts

of comfort and encouragement, which, indeed, his natural veracity obliged him, at every other sentence, to contradict. In his increasing eagerness to rouse her from a state of silence and torpor, which both perplexed and alarmed him, he now detailed to her the particulars of the search in which they had just been engaged, the design of which he had before concealed from her.

Clarina no sooner heard the reasons which led him to believe that force alone could have conveyed her sister away so far, as it was now evident she must be, from her home, and the suspicions which had prompted him to search the gipsies' tents, than a light, sudden and fearful as a meteor's flash, seemed to dart across her mind. Her cheek, varying alternately from deep crimson to a livid paleness, betrayed the intense emotion she endeavoured to command. In low tones, and with difficult but distinct articulation, she detailed the particulars which, the very day before, she and her sister had received from Trefarley, concerning the extraor-

dinary dwelling he had discovered, and its suspicious inhabitants.

In the eager and breathless attention with which all present, especially Geoffry, listened to the strange recital, no one marked the strong but transitory shade of guilt and fear which darkened Leonard Claverham's brow, as he thus heard his confederates pointed out, and their secret abode accurately described.

Clarina affirmed in conclusion, that Mr. Trefarley had promised on that very day to obtain from Mr. Eldridge authority and means to disperse these ruffians. Her eye once more beamed with hope, as she added, that the former, who had, consequently, not visited Warrington that morning, might even by this time have detected and pursued the wicked crew, into whose hands none of her auditors now seemed to doubt but that her unfortunate sister had fallen.

Claverham, who well knew that his accomplices must be beyond a pursuit, which, from the magistrate's absence (of which he was aware) could not take place till the morrow, with spe-

cious zeal echoed Geoffry's honest and clamorous offers to go immediately, even through the darkness of the inclement night, in search of the abode Clarina described. But, alas! she owned she could give no direction which might enable them, even by the light of day, to find it. To explore the intricate and almost trackless passes which Trefarley had represented as surrounding it, in such a night as the present, was evident madness in the eyes of all but Geoffry; whose excited feelings rendered him incapable of listening to the suggestions of reason. Witches and French-women excepted, (a mysterious and fearful combination of which formidable beings had, he firmly believed, centered in Mademoiselle Jaqueline, and justified his terror in that quarter,) Geoffry's naturally bold and ardent spirit feared nothing. In his vehement desire to rescue Miss Starinville from the hands of wretches like those now described, his disappointment, therefore, was keen at finding that even Clarina herself, agonising as was her distress, would not consent to his attempt-

ing so rash and bootless an enterprize without instruction or guide. He should go, she said, before daylight dawned, on horseback to Mr. Trefarley, who, if he had not already rescued her sister, would instantly accompany and guide his search.

This decision was approved by all; and Claverham, in a faint tone, now announced his intention of accompanying Geoffry. Till that moment, Clarina, as well as all the domestics, had utterly forgotten both Leonard's recent accident, and its supposed effects; but being somewhat calmed by the arrangement thus made, all turned to look on Claverham, whose air of extreme languor, together with the cold and dripping state of his garments, so shocked both Clarina and the housekeeper, that both entreated him to retire; and the latter, even warmed into kindness, conducted him herself to his chamber, where stirring a blazing fire, she left him to prepare some refreshment, of which he really stood in need. When Leonard had partaken of the food with which she

quickly returned, he dismissed his attendant, affirming that he should immediately go to rest, to prepare for the expedition he still insisted on sharing.

Left to the solitude of his own chamber, however, it may well be imagined he thought not of rest. He hastily scanned the course most prudent to pursue, and at length determined to avail himself of the plea the supposed weakness of his state afforded, to avoid accompanying Trefarley (whose penetration he dreaded) on a quest in which it might be difficult totally to mask his feelings.

Perhaps some lurking reluctance to behold again the body of his victim might partly have influenced this resolve; but except to ingratiate himself in Clarina's favour by renewed services, no sufficient motive appeared for a measure, against which prudence, if not remorse, remonstrated, and Claverham rested in his decision.

He now again revolved the circumstances around him, and only grew more secure as he ruminated. No one, he was convinced, knew

that he had quitted the house that day. Dugavet's murder, when discovered, as it soon must be, could never, therefore, be attributed to him; nor could any cause for contention between them be suspected. Stephen, his servant, though sufficiently in his master's confidence to be aware that being for some reason averse to quit Warrington, he had, consequently, assumed an appearance of illness, the constraint of which he had lately relieved by long nightly walks, had yet no knowledge whatever of the secret abode which formed at those times his resort. He could not, therefore, betray a crime he did not even suspect.

Leonard was too well convinced of the activ-

which both the fears and the interest of his vile confederates would urge them to exert, to doubt for a moment that long before this they had already embarked in silence and secrecy, in their well-equipped and swift-sailing vessel; and he thought of the robust and merciless arm which might, at that very instant, perhaps, be plunging the hapless girl into the

dark waves which were to close her short career. Villain as he was, he shuddered at the picture his fancy drew; and starting from his chair, listened for a moment to the moans of the wind, which swept by his window with the low and dismal howl peculiar to a snow-storm, till he almost fancied it conveyed to him the wretched Agatha's imploring cry. But he quickly shook off this transient impression, and turned from the contemplation of a deed, which was, indeed, to crown his plans, but from the too vivid image of which he thus recoiled, to contemplate nearer and less terrific objects. Dugavet, he reflected, was safe in the silence of death, and could betray no secrets.

Madame de Rouvier remained his sole accomplice; and deprived of all protection but his own, disgraced by the disclosure so near at hand, shocked at the catastrophe of her faithless lover, and alarmed at the consequences which, he felt, he might easily persuade her, threatened her personal safety, he doubted not that she would readily adopt the measure of

immediate flight to France, which he resolved in the first moment of her distress to propose.

Anxious to ascertain the present state of her mind, and fancying that he might even now, by some artful suggestions, prepare her for such a step, he determined, as soon as all should seem quiet in the house, to visit her apartment, where he felt assured he should find her as wakeful as himself; but he waited in vain. Clarina's anxiety was far too deep for repose; and, therefore, though she positively insisted on Geoffry's retiring to rest, to prepare for fresh toils by a few hours' sleep, she resolved, with Mrs. Rustleton, to watch through the night, lest her unfortunate sister should, either alone, or with some assistance, approach the house. The storm, which having commenced at three in the afternoon, lasted with increasing force till midnight, was now clearing away, and the moon, breaking at intervals through the disburdened clouds, at last rode in full majesty over the wide and glittering waste of snow.

Clarina gazed alternately from every window

with restless anxiety; and as Leonard heard her traverse the passages, sometimes with all the flutter and speed of hope, excited by some treacherous appearance, and sometimes with the dull and heavy tread of despair, he perceived that no pause in watchfulness like hers was likely to afford him the opportunity he sought of holding conference with Madame de Rouvier; and retiring to bed, he, the author of all the calamity which thus broke the sleep of others, soon sunk into profound and heavy repose.

CHAPTER XV.

LONG before a gleam of day appeared, Geoffry was on his feet. And assuring Clarina, who expressed some fear for his safety, "that he should find his way very well," he proceeded to hurry Joe in the stables.

Claverham also, equipped for sallying forth, made his appearance, but, according to his previous determination, with marks of languor and indisposition so well assumed, that both Clarina and the housekeeper insisted on his again retiring to his chamber, instead of venturing on an expedition for which he expressed greater desire, in proportion as they became more positive against it.

There was, Clarina assured him, no need of the assistance which he was so ready, though so

unable, to give. Geoffry would ride as quickly as possible to Mr. Trefarley, who, returning with him, would bring what aid he might deem necessary, in addition to the servants Joe and Stephen, who should await him on the road, that no time might be lost in coming to the house. Her cheek grew paler, however, as she added, that she begged he would lend whatever arms he might possess, as these men might but too probably be engaged in some perilous encounter.

Claverham, after well-feigned reluctance, consented to retire; and his servant soon returned from his master's chamber with the pistol which had already done such murderous work. Geoffry was by this time on horseback, armed with a gun, the only weapon in the house; and Clarina now watched from the window the progress of the faithful steward in the moonlight, with an intensity of anxiety as intense as if her sister's life had depended on every step.

It was surprising with what rapidity he floundered through the snow, and was soon lost to

her sight in the wood. Still she continued to watch, till light from the east began to dim the moon's fading lustre: though it was still nearly an hour before the sun actually rose, when she saw the two servants on foot—Stephen armed with his master's pistol, and Joe wielding a ponderous bludgeon, proceed towards the wood to wait Mr. Trefarley's arrival.

Mrs. Rustleton, meantime, had prepared some breakfast, of which she now obliged her young mistress to partake; and being herself refreshed by this food, and not a little cheered with the change from moonlight (a species of illumination which, being neither lover nor poet, she had once or twice through the night asserted, "was always to her fancy very lonely and ghost-like,") to the broader radiance of day, she began to indulge in some brief utterance of her thoughts, without heeding very narrowly whether Clarina attended or not to her discourse. "It was very shocking, indeed, if people were to be snatched up in their own gar-

dens, like this, by a set of wicked French gipsies She should not wonder, if Madam Rover, for all her crying and shutting herself up in her room," (where Clarina had, in fact, visited her in the course of the night, and found her in tears,) "knew all about it—and so, perhaps, it would turn out, when Mr. Trefarley brought Miss Starinville back——

"And who knows," continued Mrs. Rustleton, getting warm in her hopes, "but what it may finish by all these French people being hanged together! At least, I do not see what can be the use of our Judges travelling about, as they do, to hang our own rogues, if these foreigners are to be allowed to play such tricks here! And what hard-hearted creatures they are! There's Mademoiselle Jaqueline sleeping away, I warrant, up-stairs, without caring for any of our distress! Even Mr. Claverham, I am sure, has been very kind——" But Mrs. Rustleton here suddenly recollected that she had promised Stephen to take his master some

breakfast, and the whole current of her thoughts being changed by this suggestion, she quitted the room, to Clarina's great relief, on her charitable mission.

Clarina was still at her station in the window, when the figure of Stephen leading three horses towards the house suddenly emerged from the wood, and convinced her that Trefarley and the steward, with probably some friend, had already commenced their approach on foot to a spot, which she well remembered had been described as inaccessible on horseback. It was even so. Trefarley's agony of distress, on hearing Geoffry's intelligence, amounted almost to frenzy; while the steward's disappointment at finding him thus ignorant of the whole transaction, instead of having already pursued and arrested Miss Starinville's enemies, (as he had hoped,) was not a little severe. Few unnecessary words, however, passed between them. Trefarley, well armed, flung himself on a horse, and followed by Geoffry, they crossed the common in silence, and at all the speed they could make, till overtaking

a young farmer, also on horseback, Geoffry drew up for a moment to explain to him their purpose, and invite his assistance. This was willingly granted, and both proceeded with redoubled speed to rejoin Trefarley, who was already some distance before them. They now descended the hill, and were quickly met in the wood by the two servants. Mr. Drywinkle, shrewd and suspicious even in the midst of his grief, here proposed sending Stephen home with the horses ; deeming, that Joe's assistance, though perhaps less powerful, might be better relied on. He therefore took the pistol from Stephen, and bestowed it on his new associate, the young farmer, and all three followed Trefarley, who interfered with none of these arrangements, (ascertaining only that his attendants were armed,) down the steep track which has been before described, and through which he now plunged midleg deep in snow, with a desperation and activity that more than once threatened to leave his companions behind. Yet, when they reached the hollow grounds below, it was a considerable time

(so changed was the appearance of all around, imbedded, as it was, in snow) before Trefarley, notwithstanding his maddening anxiety, could discover the course of the little stream, which he knew must direct his path, or perceive among the distant and whitened trees the taller summit which had formerly served as his beacon.

At length, however, he traced the rivulet, threading its crooked way between deep banks of snow, and thought he perceived afar the lofty tree which was to guide his course. Alas! no wreath of smoke, however faint, curled near it, to indicate that he might find the hut inhabited; and without fire, what human beings could there have passed the night? Trefarley shuddered as he thought of Agatha's sufferings, and strode on in dead and gloomy silence.

The rest followed, one by one, forcing their way through brushwood too thick to admit of two abreast. The track, such as it was, now buried in snow, they frequently missed; but Trefarley, keeping by the course of the rivulet, continued ascending, and occasionally be-

held the tree, which he felt convinced was the one he sought. At length he arrived at the turn he well remembered, and observed with horror, but in silence, that the bushes were here evidently more bent and displaced than on his former visit, as if more persons than one had passed violently through together.

The snow covered all other traces, if such there were; and Trefarley spoke but to direct his followers in a low whisper to force themselves through the brushwood on both sides, and thus prevent any escape, while he himself pushed up the path which he knew led directly to the hut.

Geoffry would fain have shared this perilous lot, but Trefarley was inflexible, and promising to bring his companions round him by a shout, so soon as he should ascertain that no alarm had as yet caused the ruffians to disperse. They obeyed his injunctions, and he was quickly out of their sight. Several minutes elapsed before any sound reached them, when a low call, rather than a shout, was heard, and each

breaking through the brushwood, hastened to the spot.

At the door of the hut stood Trefarley alone, his pistol, indeed, in his hand, but in the calm attitude of despair, rather than any gesture of violence. He uttered in a few low tones,

"She is not here—but you will find evil doings yonder!" and he pointed to the hut, into which they all crowded with eager curiosity.

There lay outstretched the body of the handsome and youthful Dugavet, now stiff, and as if cemented to the earth in his own coagulated blood. Though the interior of the building was too dim to allow of any very distinct vision, yet all perceived plainly enough that a scene of murder was before them, and a low and broken exclamation of horror burst from each, as they separately entered the hut.

Shocked even to agony by the discovery that Miss Starinville was not there, while the broken bushes without, and the murdered man

within, manifested but too well that some violent contest had taken place, which he felt a terrified assurance must have been on her account; Trefarley, on discovering the corpse, had stood for some minutes in total and almost distracted silence. But having aroused himself, and brought his followers round him, he now directed them to bring the body out, and prepare to remove it to the house; while he would himself, he said, hasten forward to break the dreadful tale to Clarina, and consult on farther means of recovering her unhappy sister.

Accordingly, gently lifting the corpse, the men brought it to the door, and laid it on the snow, upon which the risen sun was now glittering. All trace of the stormy passions which, but too often, were wont to agitate the lofty features of the rash and ill-fated Dugavet had vanished, and his countenance wore the placidity and stillness of death. The ball having entered the back of his head, no stain of blood disfigured his face; which, now disguised no

more by the ill-suited head-dress he had so long worn, but bordered only by his own raven locks clustering darkly round his open and noble brow, looked, even in death, transcendantly handsome.

Trefarley, absorbed as he was in his own deep cares, gazed on it with interest and compassion, mingled with curiosity.

"Whence came, and who was this noble-looking stranger so foully murdered?"

He turned toward Geoffry, to demand if he could answer these inquiries, and beheld the steward standing at the foot of the corpse in a state of frightful agitation. His eyes wide open, were staring upon the face before him, which was not more pallid than his own, while large drops were standing on his visage, and every limb seemed trembling. Trefarley knew him too well, to imagine that fear alone could have such power over his stout nerves. It could not be sorrow so deep for a stranger's fate—Could it be guilt? He indignantly chased the unworthy thought away, while he asked,

"Have you ever seen this person before, Mr. Drywinkle?"

Geoffry answered only by a wild and vacant stare; but as Trefarley repeated the inquiry, with a tone of more authority, he muttered almost unintelligibly,

"Heaven have mercy upon us! Seen her?" and his very teeth chattered with agitation.

"Come away, Mr. Drywinkle! For mercy's sake, come away!" cried Joe, actually sobbing aloud with terror, and pulling the skirt of Geoffry's coat with all his force, utterly regardless of Trefarley, who, astonished and angry, was demanding explanation.

"Come away, I say!" reiterated Joe; "She'll change into some other shape in a minute, I 'll be bound, and tear us all to pieces!"

"This is absurd—revolting!" cried Trefarley. "Have you been engaged in this atrocious deed yourselves, that you are thus distracted? Hold that boy fast!" he exclaimed to the young farmer, who was gaping with amazement; while his own suspicions increasing as he

spoke, he himself approached the steward to prevent his escape.

But Mr. Drywinkle's voice and understanding were beginning to return, and in a querulous, but still trembling tone, he replied, "Why no, Mr. Trefarley; I would not have murdered her, as you seem to think, though I don't deny that I always hated her! But this is very shocking!" He paused, and looked in Trefarley's face as he said this, seeming to expect the compassion his own now manifested: but seeing only amazement and displeasure there, he suddenly recollected himself, and added, "I don't know how she 's come to such a cruel end, nor why she has put on such a dress, but it 's certainly Mademoiselle Jaqueline! Her own countrymen, I suppose, must have murdered her!" A long pause ensued, and Geoffry, stooping to the body, lifted one of the hands. "He 's quite stiff and cold!" continued the steward, whose puzzled understanding vibrated painfully between the masculine figure before him,

and the female with whom he had so long, and so sorely against his will, associated.

Meantime, Trefarley was too deeply shocked for speech; nor, indeed, would he have given utterance to the distracting thoughts which crowded fast and thick into his mind. Who was implicated in this foul transaction—to what arts had the ill-fated Miss Starinville fallen a prey—and in whose power was she now? Claverham—Madame de Rouvier—rose to his thoughts in succession. But he had heard from Geoffry of Claverham's exertions,—of Madame de Rouvier's evident grief: both remained, too, at Warrington, and how should either of them have produced, or even desired, the loss of the innocent Agatha, or the sad catastrophe of the youth before him? Trefarley's conjectures were baffled; when suddenly the few sentences of admiration which he had heard Miss Starinville utter but a day or two before, concerning Jaqueline; the exculpation of that person's conduct, which she had also warmly

pronounced but the preceding morning, struck like daggers to his heart.

He recalled the earnest, even enthusiastic, manner in which she had spoken; and casting a look of agony on the handsome figure on the earth, the unhappy Trefarley, hastily bidding two of the men remain with the corpse, rushed from the spot, with a haste which left the steward, who followed him to the house, far behind.

CHAPTER XVI.

We must now hasten over the proceedings which ensued. Clarina's amazement at the vile deception which had so long been practised in their house; her disgust at the exposure of Madame de Rouvier's character, which followed this discovery; and her horror at the cruel murder which had so tragically closed such a tale of iniquity,—though poignant, as from her youth and innocence might be inferred, were yet considerably blunted by her all-engrossing anxiety regarding her sister's fate. No trace of the lost Agatha could be found, though Trefarley, who breathed not the suspicions that so cruelly agitated his heart, rested scarcely night or day in his search, and employed every means he could devise to ascertain her destiny. But the

very footsteps of the wretches in whose power she had been left were obliterated by the snow-storm, which had at once pursued and sheltered them; nor had human eye witnessed their escape. It appeared, indeed, from inquiries on the coast, that the fishermen of the little hamlet of L——, about ten miles distant, had once or twice of late observed a strange vessel standing, in the dusk of the evening, towards a small creek in a solitary part of the shore. But no farther information could be elicited, and suspicion itself could draw nothing from intelligence so vague. Even the murder of the unhappy Dugavet (so dark and mysterious was the transaction,) gave no clue, nor could, indeed, be traced to hold any connexion with Agatha's disappearance. She had not been seen with him that day, nor had any kind of intercourse ever been known to subsist between them.

All firmly believed that Claverham had not left the house till he issued with the rest in search of Miss Starinville. It chanced, too, that Stephen, who had gone out that morning

to exercise his master's horses, had been (by a very unusual condescension) accompanied by Mr. Drywinkle on his own pony; and both having taken the road to Esterfield, a long visit there to Mrs. Gripskirt had detained them, till the snow had actually begun to fall as they entered the stables on their return. Long before this, as has been seen, Claverham had reached the house; and while his excursion had thus escaped all observation of the shrewd and trusty steward, the latter could also affirm that he had had Stephen in his sight all the morning. From the time of breakfast, of which, as usual, he had partaken below, no one had seen Dugavet; and from the report of the surgeons at the inquest, (which was held as speedily as possible,) it appeared he must have been dead nearly twenty-four hours before they viewed the body. On Madame de Rouvier seemed then to rest the only remaining suspicion—yet her undisguised agony on beholding the corpse, her wild and vehement lamentations spoke but too plainly that she could have had no hand in the death

of him whom she thus bitterly bewailed; nor, indeed, did any motive for such a deed appear; while, that she could have had any interest in concealing or removing Miss Starinville, seemed equally incredible. At Trefarley's suggestion, however, she was closely and carefully examined by Mr. Eldridge the magistrate, but in vain.

While she was still weeping over the corpse of the unfortunate Dugavet, with a vehemence of passion from which most of the beholders turned away with a mixture of pity and disgust, Leonard Claverham had seized the opportunity of whispering to her the suggestions he had prepared regarding her own safety.

Even in the midst of her wildest grief, her alarm for herself predominated. The belief that Dugavet had probably been shot by Thiebaut in some quarrel for Agatha, which Leonard artfully insinuated, soon mingled rage with her sorrow; while the unknown danger of the law, to which she readily believed herself obnoxious, and the utter want of any remaining inducement to stay in a place where she was

now detected and despised, caused her, even through her tears, willingly to accept of Claverham's offer, to furnish her with immediate means of departure, and to promise, in return, all the secrecy and silence he required. Accordingly, the utmost skill could elicit from her, on her examination, nothing but short and sullen answers.

She had seen nothing of the Chevalier Dugavet, since he had told her early that morning that he was going out. She did not know where he went, nor who had murdered him. Did they imagine *she* could have wished or procured his death? She had never seen Miss Starinville since they had breakfasted together, and did not know that she had left the house till informed of it by her sister. It was well known that she herself seldom walked out, and never went beyond the gardens or shrubberies; she, therefore, knew nothing, and could have had no intercourse with the people Mr. Trefarley talked of, whether they were gipsies or not. She had visited Warrington solely at Mr.

Starinville's desire, and was now only anxious to return to France.

So much, and not a particle more, could be extracted from a woman, whose beauty and grace excited warmly an admiration, which her early, and it appeared, hardened depravity converted into horror and disgust.

Trefarley had related to the magistrate all the particulars concerning the suspicious persons he had discovered, but two days previous, in the wild dwelling, the sudden desertion of which seemed but too plainly to be connected with Miss Starinville's disappearance. To this (under the seal of secrecy however,) he added the circumstances of Phœbe's alarm, and Geoffry's assertion of having seen two figures enter the house at night, the description of whom corresponded with those Trefarley himself had met the succeeding evening.

All this seemed to infer an intercourse with Warrington, which was now deeply and mournfully corroborated by the mysterious disappearance of Miss Starinville, and the murder of the

unhappy Dugavet in the very hut of these wretches. Yet, though Mr. Eldridge listened with profound attention and evident interest to these details, and agreed with Trefarley fully as to the suspicions they warranted, he could obtain no clue whatever to authorize farther proceedings. The examination of the servants plainly proved that all of them had been utterly ignorant of the abode just discovered. Nor could any of the peasantry give any information regarding it, or its inhabitants.

The gipsy lad, indeed, and Marinette, had frequently been seen, both in their own tents, and also carrying on at the various cottages the arts usual with their tribe; but that they had possessed any other abode, or other companions, no one had suspected.

Claverham's real accident, and supposed confinement to the house till the very evening the alarm arose, furnished him with plausible means (of which, it may be supposed, he was not backward to avail himself,) of pleading utter ignorance concerning these strangers and their

abode: and Mr. Eldridge and Trefarley, unable to fathom deeper a mystery so impenetrable, were constrained to admit, that, whatever intercourse Madame de Rouvier or Dugavet might have held with these vagrants, (of whose French origin, after all, Trefarley could adduce no positive proof,) no conceivable reason appeared which could have induced either of them to conspire against Miss Starinville's safety and person.

Again, however, they questioned Madame de Rouvier, and again she baffled their inquiries: yet was she so far terrified by finding herself thus the object of renewed suspicion, that, on the Magistrate's departure from the house, she hastily began to prepare for a removal, which no one wished to retard. Clarina, indeed, on the contrary, felt her presence in the house to be an almost insupportable burden. From the time, when the extraordinary disclosure having been made, and Dugavet's corpse brought to the house, she had beheld Madame de Rouvier fly to meet it with the most open display of

passionate attachment, no interview had taken place between them; Clarina having confined herself to her room, whence she had only issued to receive Trefarley's reports of the continued failure of all his researches for her hapless sister, and to consult with him on the efforts still to be made for her recovery, as well as the course most eligible for herself to adopt. To continue to reside with Madame de Rouvier was impossible; and great and seasonable, therefore, was the relief afforded both to her and Trefarley, by the sudden and unhoped for declaration of her intended departure. Yet to remain perfectly alone at Warrington, at Clarina's age, and under her circumstances, appeared fraught with difficulties.

Claverham, indeed, anxious to secure her favour, and conscious he could no longer affect an indisposition, of which he had already made such fatal use, left Warrington the day after that on which the body of Dugavet was found.

As if in consideration for Clarina's feelings, he even quitted the house without asking for

any interview, though he transmitted to her a note, expressive of the deepest interest, and calling every day, repeated his inquiries, together with an account of the strenuous efforts he was making for the recovery of her sister. On first hearing of the discovery at the hut, Clarina had hastily reproached him with the interview in the shrubbery, which she instantly recollected, and which, together with more recent circumstances, convinced her that he must long have possessed a knowledge of Dugavet's real history. But Leonard, with infinite art, replied, that he had, indeed, made this discovery on the day before his accident, when the conference she mentioned had taken place; but he affirmed, that he had, during his illness which so immediately followed, reproached Madame de Rouvier bitterly, and had resolved to apprise the Miss Starinvilles of the disgraceful fact as speedily as possible. This intention, he added, Madame de Rouvier apparently suspected; and therefore, (as Clarina might have remarked,) though she conveyed his pressing entreaties to

be allowed to see them before his departure, yet she carefully avoided quitting the room during their interviews; and had even endeavoured to prevail on him to abstain altogether from such a disclosure, under the assurance that she intended very shortly to return to Paris, whither Dugavet would, of course, accompany her; and that both herself, therefore, and the Miss Starinvilles, might be spared the pain of any altercation on the subject. All this, Claverham affirmed, however, had not altered his resolution of disclosing the circumstance to the Miss Starinvilles before he should quit their roof.

The young and ingenuous Clarina was entirely satisfied with this explanation; while his recent exertions, the consciousness that she had grossly wronged him by her suspicions regarding Madame de Rouvier, and the conviction she felt that he really participated in her anxiety, greatly softened her sentiments towards him, and she warmly expressed the gratitude she entertained for his assistance and attentions. It was with Trefar-

ley alone, however, that she consulted on the difficult, even agonizing situation in which she found herself placed. To him she looked for advice and aid in the efforts which, hopeless as they now seemed, she still appeared to exist but in making, to gain tidings of her lost sister. How should she sustain the deprivation of his counsel and assistance? Even to banish Claverham from the house, who appeared so zealous in the same cause, and whose long acquaintance seemed to authorize the interest he expressed, was an ungrateful measure; and yet the lonely Clarina felt that she could not, with propriety, receive the visits of either of these two, in her sad residence, when it should become as solitary as it was sorrowful.

Trefarley, though his haggard cheek, and sometimes half-vacant eye, spoke of mental suffering, even more severe than the almost incredible bodily exertions which he daily made in search of the lost Agatha, was yet not

so engrossed by his own affliction, as not to be painfully aware of Clarina's distressing situation. Accordingly, the day before Madame de Rouvier had announced her intended speedy departure, he informed Clarina that Mrs. Arleston, a widow lady, (with whom Miss de Cruce had formerly been acquainted,) had just returned to the neighbourhood, having lost her only daughter, for whose sake she had tried change of climate in vain. She had taken, he said, such small apartments, as her straitened circumstances would permit, in the town of ——, some miles distant; and he added that, though not a person of much refinement, either in tastes or habits, yet, as she was both a respectable and worthy woman, he thought she might prove a useful companion to Clarina, should the latter feel inclined to offer her an asylum at Warrington, which she would probably be happy to accept. Clarina eagerly caught at this suggestion.

She knew Mrs. Arleston to be all that Trefarley described, and as she had not before

heard either of the death of her daughter, or of her return to the neighbourhood, the proposal flashed upon her like a ray of light.

Still, whether Mrs. Arleston would consent to become an inhabitant of a house in which Madame de Rouvier yet resided; and by what means she could procure the absence of the latter person, with whom she now held no intercourse, and over whom she could have no manner of control, was sufficiently doubtful to damp Clarina's hopes; and it was, therefore, with a sensation of relief almost amounting to joy, that she received a message the next morning from that worthless woman, announcing that she should depart for France next day, and would convey any message Clarina pleased to send to her father.

Alas! in her distress, Clarina had almost forgotten that she had such a parent! Nor could it be matter of wonder, that she had never thought of recourse to him, who, by sending to his daughters such a character, had himself caused the very dilemma under which she had

been suffering. From the time of Madame de Rouvier's arrival, Mr. Drywinkle had never heard from his master at all; and if she had received intelligence, she had carefully refrained from communicating it. No answer was returned to the remittance which the faithful steward regularly transmitted, and no proof of their father's existence reached his neglected children.

The despatches, indeed, brought from him to his winning and accomplished agent, by the sordid wretches who had so quickly sold themselves to another, and still guiltier employer, had been so precise and full, concerning the extension, and ultimate object, of the seditious society, (which, by Claverham's exertions had already been established in the neighbouring town of ——) as to show that his mind was still absorbed in revolutionary plans, and his zeal in that evil cause unabated; but neither she nor they had heard from him more; and Clarina knew not even a syllable of this last communication.

Startled by Madame de Rouvier's suggestion however, she now, painful as was the task, sat down for the first time to address her father. She abstained from all reproach regarding Madame de Rouvier, which must, she felt, reflect on him who had sent her: but detailing with suppressed yet deep feeling, her sister's mysterious disappearance, and her own lonely and sorrowful situation, she informed him of her intention to ask Mrs. Arleston to reside at Warrington with her; adding, that she should immediately propose such an arrangement to that lady, and hoped she should soon receive his consent and sanction to the measure.

Madame de Rouvier expressed no desire to see Clarina, who was, on her side, glad to be spared such an interview. Having sent her this note, with good wishes for her journey, she now saw from her window the same figure (unattended by any one but Phœbe, who opened the door,) descend the front steps, and entering a chaise, drive unnoticed from a house, her entrance into which had caused such ex-

traordinary, and, it seemed, not unfounded, alarm, nearly twelve months before.

Clarina's thoughts ran hastily and sadly through all that the interval had produced. Miss de Cruce's death—Rybrent's departure—and, above all, the destracting loss she had now sustained, of a sister with whom she had shared all these cares, and without whom she felt a desolation, compared to which their former lamented loneliness seemed happiness itself; all this passed in dark review before her, and called bitter tears down her cheek. One pang of regret, too, struck upon her heart for Madame de Rouvier herself—so young, so beautiful, so gay, so capable of better things—yet so artful and so depraved!

She beheld the carriage wind away; and while she thought of her father, and the petition she had addressed to him, she shuddered at the possibility that he might try her obedience by some fresh and fearful test. The unsuspecting Clarina, however, might have spared herself all anxiety respecting the result of this application

to her father. Madame de Rouvier, frightened at the dangers which she imagined beset her; fearing lest her departure should be prevented; and anxious to avoid this, by conciliating all parties, had made this complimentary offer to Clarina only for that purpose; not having in reality the smallest intention of seeking any interview with Mr. Starinville, still less of being herself the bearer to him of the disclosure concerning Dugavet, which she naturally supposed such an epistle would contain. Accordingly she had scarcely quitted the avenue, when opening Clarina's letter, and glancing her eye down its contents, she saw with some astonishment that the detail she expected was not there; and smiling at what she considered the foolish simplicity of the request it contained, she carefully tore it into minute fragments, and scattered them on the road.

She then pursued her journey with mingled feelings, the predominant sensation, however, being that of relief in change of scene, while her sadder thoughts were soon brightened by

the anticipation of a fresh career at Paris, with recruited finances and unfaded charms. She had, indeed, loved Dugavet with a sincerity, and for a period, far exceeding that she had bestowed on any former admirer. But she had already wept for him a week; and his fate being now past recal, she fled from Warrington and England with the joy of a captive escaping from a dungeon, to hurry back to a capital whose pleasures were congenial to her taste, and where fresh triumphs in new society might await her.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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